

DESIGNING A FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPMENT
OF A CHRISTIAN LIFE PLAN IN A
POSTMODERN CONTEXT

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
DEDICATION.....	vii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
1. MINISTRY FOCUS.....	4
2. BIBLICAL FOUNDATION.....	31
3. HISTORICAL FOUNDATION.....	58
4. THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION.....	77
5. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION.....	95
6. PROJECT ANALYSIS.....	112
APPENDIX	
A. PROJECT CURRICULUM	138
B. QUESTION DEVELOPMENT	147
C. OUTLINE ABSOLUTELY YOU.....	149
D. PASTORAL LETTER.	152
E. LIFE PLAN NUMBERS	155
F. PARTICIPATION FORMS.....	157
G. SESSION TRANSCRIPTIONS.	160
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	174

ABSTRACT

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Contextually, this project is located within the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, within its Fifth Episcopal District, which comprises fifteen western geographical states in the U.S. The purpose of the research project is to ascertain if the influence of biblical principles is significant enough to change perceptions in life decisions while developing a Christian Life Plan. A qualitative analysis of changes is used to measure its effectiveness before and after biblical influence. It was substantiated that the process of developing a Christian Life Plan aids in the development of the participant's Theological Anthropology; thereby starting their path to discipleship.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my biological Mother, Dorothy Lee Hamilton, who never had the opportunity to attend college, but through godly wisdom taught me the lessons of deferred compensation as we developed my life plan over thirty years ago. I will always be grateful to you and will love you always.

INTRODUCTION

The Great Commission of Jesus, the Christ is no less prevalent today than it was more than twenty centuries ago. “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age,” (Matthew 28:19–20)¹. This is the recipe given by God, the Son to save a dying world and contains a promise to be “with [us] you always, to the very end of the age.”

Today, in a postmodern environment does the prescription given by Christ remain an antidote for a world filled with fear, anxiety and doubt? Can the text of a 2000-year-old canonized Bible still provide life to desperate situations and guide us as Christians to a purposed life? Has the power of the Cross been diminished by the atypical theology that runs rampant in our nation or is God still calling the creation to be holy?

As mainline churches struggle to stay open and the numbers of the ‘unchurched’ increase, can the Christian of today still access the power of the God and use that power to develop a plan for life? This project uses theology as the active ingredient in the development of a framework designed to enable the construction of a personal Theological Anthropology - for each participant as they construct an individualized plan

¹ Biblical citations within the document are from the New International Version unless otherwise noted, Matthew 28:19-20.

for life. The construction of the plan utilizes the influence of the biblical text in practical manner in order to unpack principles that inform and may transform individual perceptions and ethos. The influence of the biblical text, and its undergirding principles, on fundamental life decisions is expected to develop into discipleship for the participants. Their greater understanding of the biblical text, its principles and the character of God will help create a platform in which to launch their Theological Anthropology.

It is hoped that new knowledge and magnified understanding of the words and ways of God will be transformative to their very existence. It is further hoped that the impact of the transformation will carry over to those under the participant's influence. This evolution of the Theological Anthropology of the participant will influence not only their life, but also those in their sphere of influence and beyond.

It is believed that the significant change of perception and ethos of one person can impact the lineage of that person for generations that follow. Discipleship is the transformation of a person's values and behaviors to align themselves with the teachings of Christ. After much research it is determined that the creation of a personal 'Theological Anthropology' is the construction of an overarching perception of God and how God, and the things of God, interact and impact the life of the person and of humankind in general. Becoming rooted and grounded in Christian beliefs is fundamental to discipleship: which is modeled behavior and values taught by Jesus, the Christ to his original Disciples.

As Christian citizens in a postmodern era, we must decide if the text of the canonized bible is still relevant enough to guide our current day decisions and lifestyles. Though we are more than twenty centuries removed from the crucifixion of Christ the

principles of the bible remain our primary source of understanding what God intended for our lives. Our memberships in churches and relationships that are affiliated with church memberships are directly impacted by what we know, believe and can perceive about the text that we have adopted as our guide for life. With this understanding, there is no better source of influence to create a life-plan that reflects our understanding of the text and is the fundamental source of reference.

Through the interaction with the text and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we identify what God has intended for our lives and then plan the implementation steps to reach our godly purpose. The creation of the plan itself, by use of biblical influence, launches the enactment of a personal Theological Anthropology for those who participate in the process. The influence of engaging the biblical text is anticipated to have a significant impact on the participant's life and the lives they influence. Hence this project is the use of a discipleship tool to help Christian engage God and become Disciples. In addition, this tool may double as an evangelistic tool as well.

As the participant shares their experience in the development of the life plan with those in their circle of influence, others will be exposed to the power of the biblical text and its ability to transform the challenges of life. As participant's share their experiences with unchurched friends and family, they share the gospel of Christ and its authority. The key element in this project is ultimately the power of the biblical text and the principles brought by Jesus, the Christ – which is as prevalent today as it was more than twenty centuries ago.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

This project is being constructed through the lens of an African-American woman raised in an environment that is primarily void of the Christian church influence. My Mother was a single parent who attended the Methodist church as a child, but practiced the philosophy of Buddhism as an adult. Divine intervention lured me to the church at a young age, and I became the only person in my household attending church at the age of ten. My attendance was sporadic and had nothing to do with spiritual worship. As a child the storytelling, songs and the elaborate clothing of the church members were enough to entice me to return weekly. I attended church through my teen years because my peers were there and my voice was needed for the choir.

Choir events allowed me to travel with the church at no expense and included food and entertainment - in the form of watching others display their joy through theatrics. Attending church was mandatory for most of the other teens, so our section included flirting between one another, catching up on the latest gossip and flaunting whatever physical attributes we were proud of.

Although my theology was unique from most of the other teenage attendees at the church, the rest of my adolescence years were similar with my 'unchurched' peers. In our community as teens we dated each other and gave ourselves to the worship of parties with all their attributes: alcohol, sexual misconduct, and dancing.

When with my church friends, my Mom was the 'cool Mom' because she allowed us to interact with each other in her presence openly without all the rules of the church being forced upon us. This type of teenage behavior was not unique to the African-American community but is actually fairly common to all communities. The exception is the fact that the first twelve years were done segregated from other racial neighborhoods.

As an adolescent I met my biological Dad, who had been missing as a Prisoner of War and presumed dead shortly after my birth. Although adopted by my step-Dad there were distinguishing physical features that alarmed me at an early age. Other than the fact that I looked like my Mother who was also extremely short in stature, there was no one else whose features were like mine. In an effort to rationalize the differences, it was common to be told that my features came from those ancestors that were more than three generations past.

There were strong physical attributes that are connected to the Native American people. Ancestry of my maternal Grandmother included Blackfoot and those of my step-Dad's mother were white. These reasons were given for the different texture of the hair, lightened color of the skin and less prominent facial features that are associated with the African-American community. These 'same differences' in attributes between siblings and myself was explained as a 'reaching back' into former ancestry. It became somewhat more difficult to explain the distinct differences in emotional and intellectual attributes.

Aside from the physical characteristics that made me different, there were demonstrated unique intellectual and emotional differences between my siblings and myself even though we grew up on the same household. At an early age, others frequently pointed out my tenacious and fearless demeanor. Mother attributed it to my

intellectual difference. From the time school began my ability to demonstrate comprehension of the math and sciences set me apart. Consequently, expectations for my achievements were vastly different than those for my brothers and sisters. It was unacceptable for my grades to be average; but needed to be above what I considered 'reasonable' for our community. Being forced to reach higher standards, forced me in turn to innovative ways to meet these expectations, while remaining popular as a teen.

At seventeen years of age, I met my biological Dad after my Mom rescued his second oldest son that had run away to California. Apparently, he looked so much like our Dad it removed all doubt regarding his parental affiliation. My father was fair skinned Native American and at thirty-three years of age I visited my paternal family for the first time to discover an entire clan that looked exactly like me. In fact, when we arrived at the annual family picnic everyone immediately recognized that I belonged to the family. For five days I was introduced to relatives and at each home was a picture of myself as a one-month-old baby. It was through my paternal Grandmother that I was introduced to the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church where I am currently serving and is the contextual backdrop for this project.

Grandmother had been an A.M.E. member for more than fifty years and held offices in the local church. Dad was also raised as an African-American in a small mid-western town. This trip ignited several long distance relationships that continued after the death of my Mom.

My mother, whose only education was her high school diploma, provided the divinely guided idea of constructing a plan that would facilitate getting out of the emotional and psychological prison of my circumstances. Together we constructed a ten-year plan with the objectives, goals and rationale for moving forward to earning an undergraduate degree and making three times the salary. This plan successfully helped me map out a route to a better life, and my Mother died in the tenth year. At the time of her death, I was a successful accountant working in a secure government job. These factors helped to construct my contextual lens, hence this project.

Although not completely void of church, as a young child my household included references to God, but did not include information regarding Jesus, the Christ. I accepted Christ at twenty-five years of age. Understanding the concept of God as a deity with the absence of Christ made sense. God was a spirit ... a God that looked over everything, but when I began to study about Christ, this added a layer of confusion. Prior to conversion, I knew Christ as the Son of God and within my own reasoning used the human roles of father and son, like that of a king and prince.

Upon conversion, I soon learned the role of Son in a different light. Not only was God a deity, but also apparently so was Jesus, as the Christ. It was difficult to comprehend that in spite of the fact that Jesus was born from a woman he was still God. Conversion came in my second year of college, but in order to grasp this complex relationship, my secular education was placed on hold. Enrolling in my local congregational School of Hermeneutics allowed me an in-depth understanding of these deities I had agreed to follow; thus in God's wisdom my bridge to ministry had been shortened substantially.

In retrospect, God's wisdom was allowing me to shortcut the path necessary to indoctrination into the family of faith. The School of Hermeneutics was much like a concentrated mixture of Bible study, ministerial readiness courses and spiritual warfare training in my local Four Square Church. You might imagine the questions that arose during these sessions. It was one thing to have someone raised in the Christian doctrine to attend, but quite another to have a newly converted Christian.

The personality that was born out of my segregated childhood in an impoverished area became an asset during this time. My lack of fear and apathy toward other's opinion of me allowed bold questions to traditional Christian dogma. It is one thing to draw upon a conclusion simply because of a traditional lens, but to have to rationalize it to a newly converted 'believer', was nothing short of comedy. Frustration and intolerance gave way to a borderline respect for tenacity by the end of the eighteen months of classes. Emerging as an obedient battle scarred spiritual warrior was my greatest ministerial feat until seminary.

The call to ministry at forty years of age came as a complete and unwanted surprise, surely God was joking. In my ignorance it was imagined that ministry would be easy since it was Christianity at a higher level, but the reality of ministry took on a different clarity since transitioning into the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. True to my roots, my genuine appreciation for the African-American experience was the armor God equipped me with in-order to walk the path ordained. Ministry in the AME Church, like I assumed in most churches, was primarily comprised of 'preacher's kids' and those who were steeped in the ways of the Christian tradition. Add to this a hybrid

believer who had no religious background, but a genuine love for God and you recognize the complexity of my calling.

As a minister in training it was expected that my service to the church would include traditional ritualistic activities and liturgical services. Obedient to the God of my life, every effort was used to learn these activities and why they were deemed important. The complexity of the activities was not hard to master, but my own apathy concerning their value created a unique barrier to entry. Rationally, my ministry was to the people in service of proclaiming the gospel and to reaching unbelievers to accept Christ as their personal Savior - rituals seemed a tiresome burden. It was not until seminary that it became apparent that these ritualistic and liturgical activities were important to the psychological and emotional acceptance of the church. It was not enough to accept Christ, but the church environment was necessary to sustain the faith of the newly converted Christian.

These factors and more have led my spiritual life and created the person in me through Christ. My struggle to find the peace, validation and freedom promised by a Christ that is all loving has been long; yet has been instrumental in my ministry to the church - where the mission is that 'none would be lost.' As with any organization, the personality of a church changes with its geographical location. Organizational offices in New York can be vastly different than those in Idaho because the cultures of the surrounding community are different. These differences also impact the operation of the organization and vary from location to location – the same is true with the church. With this being said, it is no surprise that the headquarters for the Fifth Episcopal District in Santa Monica, CA reflects its surrounding community.

Contextual Analysis

As an Itinerant Elder in her fifth year of ministry within the local church, I am seminary trained, though not raised in the ‘churched community.’ As a mature Christian reaching the autumn of my life, my background includes business and civic engagement. Although every effort is made to be objective, it is obvious that each factor in my life helps to color the lens used to analyze the entity where God has called me to service.

The Fifth Episcopal District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church is comprised of fifteen of the United States plus a church plant in India. From Alaska to Nevada, it is the largest of the districts and has over 256 thousand in membership and 214 local churches as indicated by geographic statistics of the Fifth Episcopal District.¹ There are thirteen Presiding Elders (middle management between the local church and the Bishop) and a Presiding Prelate who is an assigned Bishop from the overall church connection. The ethnic make-up of the AME church is approximately 70% African-American, 15% African and the remaining non-African (American or otherwise). The levels of income are reflective of the overall populations represented and are spread over an overarching average that is approximately \$40,000 per household.² Geographically, the Fifth Episcopal District of the AME Church is made up of the following states: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Missouri, Montana, Oregon, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, Washington and Wyoming which are divided into six conferences.³

¹ “2010 Census Interactive Population Search, from the U.S. Census Bureau,” U.S. Census Bureau, accessed September 25, 2013, <http://www.census.gov/2010census/popmap/ipmtext.php?fl=02>.

² “African-American Income,” Black Demographics, accessed October 2, 2013, <http://blackdemographics.com/households/african-american-income/>.

³ *The Book of Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 2008*, 49th ed. (Nashville, TN:

It is estimated by the Pew Forum that AME has a market share of .4% of the African-American population.⁴ Using this statistic, it estimated that the Fifth Episcopal District of the AME Church has over 171 thousand members that are African-American and an additional eighty-five thousand that are non-African-American, for a total of more than 256 thousand members.⁵ The borders of the Fifth Episcopal District are Canada to the North, the Pacific Ocean to the West, (North/South) Dakota(s) and Mississippi River to the East and Mexico to the South. Educational attainment for African-Americans is estimated at 19% and this same report identifies five of the top ten states (averaging 22.6%) of the African-American population which have a Bachelor's degree or higher.⁶

A worldview for the Fifth Episcopal District is overwhelmingly romantic. This is the view that is promoted by the Bishop and echoed by the congregations throughout. It is typical to hear this type of language, even in the face of overwhelming odds, “Just watch and see the miracles of God, if we would just humble ourselves and pray.” This is the common theme of a people who are steeped in tradition with a reluctance to change. Their heroes lie in times past, when the AME Church held a prominent position within the community. Known for their civic engagement and their relentless mission for civil rights, the AME Church is wealthy in heritage and from its membership are numerous notable leaders.

AMEC Publishing House, 2013).

⁴ “Religious & Public Life Project: Religious Landscape Survey,” Pew Research, accessed September 30, 2013, <http://religions.pewforum.org/affiliations>.

⁵ “2010 Census Interactive Population Search from the U.S. Census Bureau,” U. S. Census 2010, accessed September 25, 2013, <http://www.census.gov/2010census/ipmtext.php?fl=02>.

⁶ “African-American Income,” Black Demographics, accessed October 2, 2013, <http://blackdemographics.com/households/african-american-income/>.

The 'Romantic' worldview is characterized as: “sees life as a quest guided by knowledge that comes from a *charismatic* (inspired) spirit. ... are the result of adventure and risk of pitting protagonist – often a heroic figure – against antagonist.”⁷ It is not difficult to see the antagonist, or enemy, to the AME Church, for they have consistently fought forces that promote slavery, Jim Crowism and institutionalized racism. Written into the AME doctrine are strategies and policies to uphold civil rights for all and to champion the downtrodden. To their attribute, it is no wonder that the “rose-colored glasses” of the romantic worldview appeals to them, for it has been their experience throughout the history of the AME Church. Unfortunately, this same attribute can become a deterrent for change.

It is said that understanding workspace theology is essential to understanding the culture of those that worships there.⁸ With so many congregations making up the Fifth Episcopal District of the AME Church, it is impossible to be exact regarding the worship space for each congregation, but overall it is a depiction of their “explicit theology” high church. In the majority of church buildings there are rows of pews separated by a single aisle. These rows sit back far enough to give way to a horizontal row in a symbolization of the cross. Usually there is a kneeling altar in which congregants can bring their petitions to God, this in the traditional manner. A simple cross, stained glass or any combination of religious symbolism decorates the wall behind the pulpit and generally the ministers sit in an elevated area away from the congregation. This type of layout is typical in the AME Church because it symbolizes the 'temple' of biblical times.

⁷ Nancy T. Ammerman, *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1988), 96.

⁸ Ibid., 92.

In the Hebrew Temple there was an outer court for common worship, but the inner court was for the priests alone. The elevation of the area further removes it from the common area of the sanctuary and proper protocol dictates only ministerial staff is allowed unless otherwise invited by the pastor. Usually musical instruments are surrounding the pulpit area in support of the priestly duties.

The high church symbolization of the worship space is a depiction of the explicit theology of the African Methodist Episcopal Church doctrine. The form of government, Episcopal, is how the church operates with its chief executives and administrative officers are bishops.⁹ The church 'Connection' adopted Twenty-Five Articles of Religion, its Apostles Creed and General Confession, which are dated back to the mid 1500's. Their beliefs are steeped in tradition and religious piety. The 'Apostle's Creed' liturgy of the church is a prime example:

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. The third day He arose from the dead; He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from hence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Church Universal, the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen.¹⁰

"A congregation's relation to any larger connection may be the subject of different implicit theologies."¹¹ Implicit theologies of the congregations that make up the AME Fifth Episcopal District are as distinct as their founding members. This writer has taken notice that the congregations of today are generally in the same vein of its founding

⁹ Ralph E. Williamson, *Developing Your Spiritual Understanding* (Nashville, TN: 2010), 39.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Nancy T. Ammerman, *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*, 33.

members. Although each local church can be different, the under-girding theology of the Fifth Episcopal District can be seen in its nickname: “The Fabulous Fifth.”

Known for its legacy of producing exceptional leaders, bishops and pastors, the Fabulous Fifth has earned its nickname both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Quantitatively, the Fifth Episcopal District has more million-dollar churches than any other district. Its budget and contribution to the connection is substantial. Qualitatively, the Fifth Episcopal District has birthed at least seven bishops over the past forty years and produced numerous community leaders, authors, and notable members of society. To their attribute, The Fabulous Fifth has earned its reputation for being innovative and relentless in its efforts to serve God's people on a larger scale. The disconnect between the explicit theology of the overall AME Church and the implicit theology of the part of the church which is known as the Fifth Episcopal District can be seen as both an asset and a liability. What better sector to make changes that allow substantial growth – than the one with the reputation for innovation? Yet, some would argue, that the very attribute of reaching beyond the given boundaries, has caused many to be loose in their ministry. Building million-dollar churches and constantly moving the boundaries is risky business. The romantic worldview often entices growth without proper planning which is a recipe for disaster in any organization.

“Narratives are the stories that shape and transmit the memories of the congregation.”¹² The stories of the AME Fifth Episcopal District are stories about its heroes such as Bishop Hamel Hatford Brookins who is credited with serving over a decade at a predominate Los Angeles church and helping to co-found Operation PUSH

¹² Nancy T. Ammerman, *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*, 33.

with Reverend Jesse Jackson and Rev. Dr. Cecil “Chip” Murray. Dr. Murray also served in Los Angeles, built a million-dollar cathedral, had countless wins in community civic engagement projects and now heads the School of Religion at a prominent university in Southern California.

Noted dignitaries continue in Bishop Vhasti Murphy Mackenzie who was the first female Bishop of the AME Church, author of many publications and now serves in the Tenth Episcopal District. Bishop John Richard Bryant, the head of the Council of Bishops for the AME Church and known as the Father of Pentecostalism in the AME Church. Bishop T. Larry Kirkland who now presides over the Fifth District. These are stories that depict heroes from the “Fabulous Fifth” who sought human rights for all people, thus symbolizing the intended Practical Theology of African Methodism. The lives of those counted a success include many failures and the congregations that lived through them. ‘Counting the Cost’ is its practical theology of the Fifth Episcopal District:

Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, ‘This person began to build and wasn’t able to finish.’... In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples. “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear, (Luke 14:28-30, 33).

Being disciples of Christ means risking it all for Christ, which is the ingrained message behind the mentality of those who put it all on the line – risking at every turn the sting of defeat.

“The theological image then throws new light on the question: Where is God

active (or absent) in this time and place?"¹³ The Fifth Episcopal District of the AME Church likens itself to king David of the Bible: A servant after the heart of the Lord, having many fleshly flaws. Like king David, the AME Church was born out of a no-win situation. The Philistine named injustice threatened to destroy God's people and dared anyone to try and stop him. Young David only had his wits and skills learned by tending sheep dared to go against the Philistine, because he knew that the God he served would not let him fail. This is the biblical portrait of the AME Church, in particular the Fifth Episcopal District.

Not unlike King David, whose victories mounted and he was elevated in his quests, the AME Church's mounting victories took them beyond civil rights extending their influence of issues regarding higher education, greater fiscal wealth and breaking spiritual boundaries sustaining generational curses. Like our beloved King David, the roads leading to victory are scattered with improprieties, misjudgment and sin. Although the Fifth Episcopal District is apart of the greater AME Church, it is nested in the western part of the country where miracles of 'stardom' happen and visions (or dreams) are a way of life. As we remember that church people are apart of a greater society, we must recognize the correlation of the larger social values being evident in the value system of its subsets: Hollywood is a place of miracles, so is the Fabulous Fifth.

"Memory is the basis of any identity that is more than ephemeral. One of the strengths of the congregations is their ability to endure over time, even with changes of leadership and membership."¹⁴ Changes in the Episcopal leadership of the church occur in regular cycles and can be as different as night and day. Irrespective of the change,

¹³ Nancy T. Ammerman, *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*, 28.

¹⁴ Nancy T. Ammerman, *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*, 28.

those who serve in the Fabulous Fifth simply adjust without diminishing their fundamental motives. Much like the mindset of the fundamental African-American family in the United States, so is the Fifth Episcopal District. In today's economic upheaval it is about the implementation of social healthcare, where there is fierce opposition to the point of shutting down the government to stop its enactment. As a community we have endured countless injustices, insurmountable odds and ridiculously high stakes – just to survive. The disfranchised communities of this nation do not fear the threat of shutting down a government in areas we may or may not have access. While the opposition practices what would hurt their lifestyles and value system, the disenfranchised, remember governments of old, joblessness, poverty, injustice and apathy to our situations – so we simply endure for a greater good.

Those of the Fifth Episcopal District realize that not everyone embraces our style of ministry, not everyone is willing to risk it all just to move the boundary. We recognize that the stability of the whole must out-weigh the needs of the few; therefore, we take the good with the bad and continue. A vision is the right of every believer of the most high God, and we in the Fabulous Fifth place that right in the highest priority.

“The final move in doing practical theology is action, a renewed practice of the faith, ... call “strategic practical theology.”¹⁵ Strategic Practical Theology for the Fifth Episcopal District of the AME Church is simply to utilize the tenacity of the AME Church connection; the visionaries of the Fabulous Fifth Episcopal District and the anointing of the most high God to enact a framework that enables conversion and discipleship of those who may or may not have a history of being ‘churched.’ In doing so, those touched by the gospel have an opportunity to embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ

¹⁵ Nancy T. Ammerman, *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*, 27.

in a way that allows longevity of membership and victorious living.

With a genuine concern for the people of God, the casual attitude regarding conversion and discipleship in the Fifth Episcopal District is an oxymoron. Within the past twenty years the growing number of 'unchurched' dictate that they are the individuals who are joining the church today. These individuals bring little or no church experience, but are attracted by the many social programs and the dynamic preaching of the gospel. The church represents a new element in their lives and they come with a zeal that should result in longevity, but this is usually not the case. Instead, these new Christians encounter century old protocols, antiquated programs, and a feeling of alienation due to their lack of church history. Most drop their membership in less than a year because it is too difficult to remain a foreigner in a place that calls them family.

The action needed in the AME Church, and in particular the Fifth Episcopal District, is to re-think the importance of conversion and discipleship. God is still calling the masses to the foot of the cross, but too often they are held back by the stumbling blocks of the past. For those who remember playing the old hymns, family singing in choirs and doing the summer activities of the church – the tradition provides a comfortable memory. This is not the same for those who lack such memories and these events may feel like time being wasted. The answer lies in bringing relevance of the activity to the lives of the participants.

As God continues to call unbelievers to the church, the people of the church must have the wisdom to realize that without relevance, the memberships will be short-lived within the denomination. It is not enough to pray that if the new members leave that they

have obtained enough to plant themselves into another venue because far too often they merely return to their pre-Christian lifestyles.

Transformation through strategic Practical Theology will involve re-visiting all aspects of how the church represents itself to unbelievers. The first step is starting at the beginning with God and the Great Commission. “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age,” (Matthew 28:19–20). Jesus, our Christ was explicit in what he was asking his disciples to do: make other disciples by teaching them to live according to the gospel – so this must be our first priority in doing the work of God.

The Great Commission of Jesus, as it is now known, contains not one but two commands. ... The Double Commission is significant. The proclamation of the good news of Jesus is utterly essential. The facts about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and the truths he declared must be let loose in the minds and hearts of all people. Always and everywhere humanity needs the illumination only Jesus can give.” ... Making disciples is of equal importance. People must be brought into an abiding relationship with Jesus. Discipleship is a growing experience.¹⁶

New Christians are called babies because they are learning to live, think and behave in a manner that is foreign to them, but we think a few hours of membership class will give them all they need. Then when they do not completely understand many are ridiculed for asking questions others deem elementary. Add to this, secular perceptions of the ‘Christian’ as being self-righteous and contradicting may be enough to make a new believer rethink their decision. The church must realize the dual responsibility in ministry. Just as the new believer is learning a new way, the church has a responsibility in

¹⁶ Alan Walker, *Making Disciples* (Lake Junaluska, NC: World Evangelism, 1980), 1.

helping new converts to heal. Luther Smith Jr. asserts that, “Caring for another also means determining the root causes which threaten another’s well-being.”¹⁷ So it is essential that we identify their pain or what has prevented them from coming into the church.

After a new believer joins a congregation, it is the responsibility of the membership and the pastors to develop a curriculum that is relevant to the lives of the new member, instead of expecting the new member to become a mature Christian overnight. The call to action for the church is to develop a process for indoctrinating new believers that promotes understanding of the principles of God, longevity of membership in the church and allows the new believer to embrace the family of Christ in a way less threatening. “Disciple making includes introducing people to Christ, building them in faith, and sending them into the harvest field. This process can be summarized by what I call the three Ds of disciple making: Deliver them, develop them, and deploy them.”¹⁸ Their development must include understanding their resistance to coming into the church. A process of understanding and enlightenment regarding any stereotypes or misgivings is necessary, with the burden of understanding being placed on the pastors and existing congregations, not the new members. The concept of understanding and enlightenment is echoed by Brueggemann, “Discipleship is no easy church program. It is a summons away from our characteristic safety nets of social support.”¹⁹

¹⁷ Luther E. Smith Jr., *Intimacy and Mission: Intentional Community as Crucial for Radical Discipleship* (Scottsdale, AZ: Harold Press, 1994), 156-57.

¹⁸ Lee N. June and Matthew Parker, *Evangelism and Discipleship in African-American Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 53.

¹⁹ Walter Brueggemann, *The Word That Redescribes the World: The Bible and Discipleship*, (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2006), 95.

The definition of “... “dialectical hermeneutic,” (is) the conversation between the resources of the faith tradition and the practices of this congregation.”²⁰ In order to engage in the new Christians in a way that is relevant, the church must remember its roots. Itinerancy was born out of circuit travel of ministers to ensure rural souls heard the message of Christ. Those serving in the AME Church need only take the same burden upon themselves for unbelievers who may be geographically close, but spiritually far away.

Evangelism is to bring the gospel to those who need it, but evangelism alone is not enough, “evangelism is incomplete if it does not flow naturally into discipleship. Discipling is seeing that the new convert is rooted and grounded in the faith, (Colossians 2:6,7).”²¹ The Fabulous Fifth need only ask themselves who needs the gospel more than the unsaved. Positioning our churches so that they are accessible is only half the equation. The other half is positioning our lives so that we are accessible – not just reachable. Dialectical Hermeneutics is to reason the relevance of the gospel to people who do not understand its dynamics. Therefore, reasoning is required to understand the life of the ones they are reasoning with. How can, the church, effectively reason with a non-believer about the relevance of Christ to their lives if they are constantly demonizing them and the ones they love? Our very language must be re-aligned with fundamental agape love. It is no wonder that “Today, we live in a society where many are increasingly comfortable with using the description “post-denominational” to depict the American

²⁰ Nancy T. Ammerman, *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*, 37.

²¹ Lee N. June and Matthew Parker, *Evangelism and Discipleship in African-American Churches*, 53.

religious scene.”²² If we are going to reverse these trends, our presence must be seen when there is a need, not for self-grandiosity, but that others will recognize the love of Christ before we tell them. Our focus must be turned to accommodate the simplest question, while being open to search out complex answers. First and foremost we must be people of the most high God before we are anything else and that requires servant-hood. What a concept!

The resources of the African Methodist Episcopal Church is a love of God's people so deep those called to minister were willing to ride hundreds of miles to assure the gospel reached even the most rural areas. The result of this analysis ends in the hypothesis that the church must not abandon its roots, but rather develop a new system of implementation that aligns itself with the current needs of those who need the gospel the most. If we can build million dollar cathedrals; we surely can construct a system that will better indoctrinate those new converts into the faith, that encourages longevity – then just do it, for surely God is with us - to the end of the age.

Synergy

The idea of a purpose or synergy for a ministry is one that often escapes the everyday person. How often are we blessed to have the time and the foresight to reflect upon the methodology of God in our lives? Had I not become a doctoral student, I doubt if I would have found it relevant to reflect back, but instead looked forward to the next bend in the road? To see the hand of God in your life is as exciting, as it is frightening. Born to a former Methodist, single parent who became a Buddhist - while raising her

²² Mark Toulou, *Joined in Discipleship: The Shaping of Contemporary Disciples Identity* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1997), 246.

children in the ghetto, is not a scenario I would have thought up, but fortunately God found it relevant.

When considering all that took place, my thoughts go to the Apostle Paul. Not that I was as learned or as religious as Paul, but rather an unlikely candidate for the ministry. Also, like Paul, God sent me forth to touch the lives of those who are lost, in the same way I was lost. Caught up in the ways and methods of the social environment, there was nothing wrong with a “little sin” once in awhile. It was not until ‘I came to myself’ that I realized the ramifications of that little sin. As a result of this revelation, God has sent me forth to reach those who also need to find themselves. When you know just enough about the word of God to distort it; thereby, reducing its value to a mere desperate formula, it is referred to as ‘street gospel.’ This occurs when you have not attended church enough to understand, but merely remember phrases and sayings of your elders. Momma said it and Granny said it ... we don’t know why, but they said it would work so those “sayings” are repeated in hopes that it will do the same for them. The repetition of these “sayings” is much more deadly than atheism because people start to believe they understand God and the word meant for their salvation.

Just like others who practice ‘street gospel’ my habits led to seeing God through the eyes of my elder. Momma always talked about God, though she chanted to Buddha and I somehow crossed the two to create my own idol. Wandering in the desert without a clear comprehension of moral code that extended outside of my environment gave me my own wilderness experience which included my own version of the commandments of the streets.

As Christians have commandments or rules of conduct; so do those who practice street gospel. They tend to be self centered and narcissistic. They may include: love no one before you love yourself, give to others only if you have to, purposely strike first to gain an edge, and always be true to self regardless of the circumstance. They may also include: if it feels good to you, it must be good for you, stealing is not considered a crime if there is a real need, it must be right if everyone else is doing it, do not feel too guilty regarding your actions toward others because they will get over it and if you are smart enough you will escape the consequences.

Living by these types of street ethics adds a new level of freshness when you encounter the true Christ. In almost every instance the mirror is turned on yourself and how you view your position in the world. Guerilla warfare that includes taking as an alternative to earning – is contrasted on every side of your life. Getting saved outside the church can really disturb your heart by letting in emotions and counter-productive feedback to survival, as you have known it. Friends, family and people in general have a hard time believing that a staunch street warrior can actually turn their cheek long enough to stay in the church. Over time the impact diminishes; but the initial shock to your circle of influence can send unwanted ripples of resentment your way. Reaching out to new relationships of those who share your new found virtue is necessary in order to stay the course.

It is not surprising that although I have been saved over thirty years vivid memories of life before Christ remain. Recollection of past attitudes and actions is not a proud moment, but often a funny one. It is amazing the insensitivity one person can have and how it impacts their entire perception of everything around them. Actions,

comments and even jokes are reflective of the overall perception of life status and position. If there is a generalized belief that life is a series of events that test your ability to meet the challenges without the circumstances – it is uniquely different if you perceive a greater purpose. Consequently, every time religious arrogance overtakes me, God reminds me of the ugliness of my past. Like Apostle Paul, God has sent me into the Gentile's camp to bring gospel in a way they can understand.

The reality of my past speaks loudly in the ministry God has given me. Being raised to never-say-never and as a warrior to fear nothing, there is a comfort in speaking truth to power, which allows me to stand strong in the face of opposition. Remembering what it means to survive by any means necessary, mustering a sharp tongue and a disconcerted look upon demand, even when it breaks my heart to do so, is emotionally available.

Why was all this so necessary, is the question that is asked the most. My finite mind cannot understand the infinite wisdom of God; therefore, it is assumed that since service placed me in an unfamiliar contextual setting that it was necessary for me to be somewhat tough skinned. My background and upbringing had provided the necessary training for this 'tough skinned' attitude. Now as a mature adult, God had given me a heart to accommodate a softer-side for ministry.

Surely, accommodation is the reason that God created in me two distinct personalities in order to fulfill God's plan. On the one side, my demeanor seems tough because it is impractical to believe that the instinctive nature of humanity will just disappear. On the other hand, it is just like God to enable a heart that melts in the face of

love. I guess it is natural to melt when faced with love, but when you have purposely stayed aloof - it becomes a new experience.

Isn't it just like God to arm us with weapons that can penetrate, but then make us vulnerable to love? This is an oxymoron only God could create. The problem with being two-sided is that people generally judge you by the side that is most prominent. In an effort to take on the attributes of Christ, the new heart was used to take on a softer personality for ministry. For those that would take this as a weakness, it can be somewhat of a problem. In the church world people often assume that in a conflict that the other person will back down because their tradition expects it. However, for those who God has made warriors (and lack church tradition), backing down is only an afterthought. We spend twice as much time recovering from fights as we do launching relationships, which is why God sent this warrior to the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

The whole "move the boundary thing" is apart of my innate personality, therefore, there is an immediately comfort zone. If moving the boundary is necessary to reach the goals and objectives deemed important for survival, indeed it must be moved. The challenges that are involved in the move itself are easily compared with other challenges of my life so that my admiration for the tenacity to do so is given to the visionaries in the Fifth Episcopal District. Walking with the visionaries of the Fifth Episcopal District brings back positive memories of walking with those who endured the challenges of my past. Spiritual warfare is a war by any definition with the difference being the Commander.

One of the greatest lessons taught to me by God is to simply be still and it turns out it has been an advantageous lesson. As a drastic contrast to my upbringing, standing still was a difficult lesson to perceive. It was not until total submission occurred, that the faith in God's promises was obtained. Reaching this level of faith could be equated to trying to dig out a large boulder in the sand using a stick. A person may work tirelessly as they sweat and dig into the sand surrounding the boulder. The difference is made when the person stops and realizes the strength of leveraging that they have not used. After the concept has been realized, the same stick and a piece of the boulder can act as to leverage the moving of the boulder with significantly less effort.

This is the vital lesson learned in the lesson of standing still. By leveraging that which only God can do, allows inner peace and calm – even in a storm. It has allowed me patience in the face of intolerance and to be tranquil in the face of turmoil. Total submission onto the Spirit of God will allow the challenge to be turned over and eliminate the need to be responsible for the outcome. Identifying self as unable to take on the challenge enables a dependency on God to bring about the desired result. By merely acknowledging God as omnipotent takes the responsibility and the necessity out of the fight. This is a lesson that can only be taught over time and endurance.

Being strong in God's power creates a paradigm shift that ripples through generations. Learning to trust God through all life's challenges is faith at its highest level. Teaching this lesson requires transparency, which is an attribute brought on by the lack of fear. You must release your concern regarding the opinions of others before you can become transparent, and be able to do so for an audience of Christ only. It is only when your purpose is to satisfy God alone, that you can negate all other issues. Neither

people nor circumstances can deter a vessel determined to please God. I only wish it was an attribute of choice, rather than a gift that allows nothing less.

Apostle Paul demonstrates the gift of faith, because only a man with the gift of faith could walk the road he was given. Apostle Paul transitioned from learned Jew protector of the Law to Apostle Paul minister to the Gentiles. In order to transition, Apostle Paul had to give up legalism for the Spirit of Truth found in Christ. His former days as a Pharisee had to give way to new days as an Apostle for Christ - all of which took an enormous leap of faith.

As Apostle Paul sought to educate newly converted congregations and lead them in the ways of the Lord, one could understand his frustration when his old character began to show. In order to accommodate a more Christ like nature, it was necessary to manage his rougher side. Paul was zealous for the Law and this attribute transferred to his passion for the ways of Christ. In spite of his circumstances, Apostle Paul refused to give up on the mission God had given him. Therefore, Paul sat in prison, refusing to fail God, and wrote letters of reprimand and encouragement to a people he had once sought to destroy.

As God furthers my ministry, it has become less content with doctrine and traditional methods of ministry. We face a time when more and more people do not believe in God; yet we continue with antiquated methods that no longer work. Young people are dying and being destroyed by a social norm that encourages selfishness and disrespect for human life; yet the church continues to be divided into 'us' and 'them.' Perhaps, addressing the issues of 'us and them,' this is the ministry that God has given me – one, which reaches outside the norm in search of a more effective way.

Since my growing up didn't really include being 'churched as a child,' my understanding and perception of the gospel allows me to reach an unbelieving population. Although God chose me to meet the needs of our current 'gentile' population; it is often unbelievable that God chose me and would trust me with those created in God's image. Moving forward in ministry, the correlation of my past experience in business, ghettos, and education, with my assigned service, becomes even clearer.

Through my childhood and adolescent experience, God brings forth the understanding of being a part of a social norm that disbelieves. God used the circumstances of life to give me the ability to defend myself emotionally and psychologically so that I could go forth with minimal fear of people because of my trust in God. God used my tenacity and thirst for learning to teach me administrative skills that would help the church. Finally, God gave me the gift of faith to encourage me to cling to the word of God for mere existence.

By experiencing the love of God in every aspect of my life, my trust has grown into a faith that is strong. This faith allows others to see the God in me, in spite of me. That same faith, allows me to stretch beyond myself to take on challenges unthinkable without God. I am excited about what God has in store for me, and moving forward know that as long as I cling to God's unchanging hand, love will not allow me to fail.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

Biblical text, its geographic locations and the events described have been under scrutiny for generations. Archeological excavations, form and literary criticism and scientific studies have consistently evaluated its authenticity, criticized its inconsistencies and questioned its credibility. In spite of these studies efforts have failed to render the text erroneous, but the social by-product of these studies has been the development of a social 'atypical theology.'

This social development is labeled 'atypical' because there is no standard for what is believed. It appears that the rational for what is believed is directly correlated with the perceptions and circumstances of the person that believes. The lack of standards of the theories developed provides the assumption that there is no standard. It seems that whatever the psyche or circumstances dictate is enough to launch a belief. With a common thread of foundations based in emotional and psychological needs, non-traditional has created a new trend in beliefs. From a big-bang theory through the progression of single-celled organisms to humankind's current physical composition, the range of beliefs that have emerged continues an attempt to render the biblical text irrelevant.

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed project it is necessary to address the social friction surrounding the project. The question to be answered: Is the

church still relevant in a postmodern context – given the social paradox of today. In a society where there are no absolutes, is the ancient text of a canonized Bible still relevant? Or as asked by Lesslie Newbigin: “But how could the biblical message be communicated with the world of classical thought without being absorbed into and neutralized by that world of thought? ... It could not merely fit into existing ways of understanding the world without fundamentally changing them.”¹ How can the text of the Bible inform an atmosphere that denies or tries to negate its very existence?

Socially acceptable substitutions for Biblical wisdom are seen in the secular moral platform. Principles of tithing are seen in mystical normality that recognizes the karma of the universe as returning back what has been distributed into it. Other principles that are clearly noted in the biblical text are taken out of context and utilized by a society which allows the magic of the promise without giving credit to the Creator. It has become common knowledge that what a person does is return to them by life's circumstances; yet the Christian is ridiculed for the same concept in Luke 6:38 (NIV): “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running together, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

It is illogical to believe that the same concept can serve the secular realm, while being deemed ridiculous for the Christian to use. Every aspect of society has turned an ungodly eye to the challenges that occur in the postmodern context. In every generation

¹ Lesslie Newbigin, *Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt and Certainty in Christian Discipleship*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 4.

there has been a seeking of enlightenment over the past generations with the postmodern enlightenment being void of the Judeo-Christian values. With postmodern social standards that now juxtapose fundamental theological credence and postmodern atypical theory – is the biblical text sustainable? Since it is easier to evaluate a tangible subject matter; rather than intangible theory, we turn to the biblical text.

It is not the focus of this project to question the facts uncovered by studies or the lack of belief by the non-Christian community in biblical truths, but rather the relevance of the church and its ability to aid those that believe the Christian doctrine in the planning of their lives by use of biblical authority. Previous examples of secular inconsistencies with their acceptance of the Christian doctrine were done only to show a contrast and the inconsistencies surrounding like concepts that are accepted and rejected by the same people. The project itself is sanctioned by theological thought that is demonstrated in the old and new testaments and documented through the Prophets and Apostles throughout the entire Bible.

Both the major and minor Prophets spoke to the people regarding the need to stay within the traditions given them by God. From the wilderness experience of the Israelites to the mishaps and sin of King David, Prophets have played a major role in delivering the message from God to the people. The old testaments are witness to the challenges of the Prophets in their interactions with the people. The New Testament is full of Jesus, the Christ and his parables that depict the character of the people in relationship to God.

Old Testament

Prophetically, the Old Testament text of Habakkuk 2:2-3 is the foundation for this work, which states, “Then the Lord replied: Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.” This book is a conversation between God and the prophet Habakkuk regarding the Israelites and their behavior during this time. In the Book of Habakkuk “The first part of the book contains a dialogue between Habakkuk and his God that alternates between lament and oracle (Habakkuk 1:2 and 2:5).”¹ The text is examined in two parts, “Habakkuk is a book in which a man, the prophet, asked questions and received answers. Note, for example, 1:2, which voices the prophet's initial question. Then 3:19 gives his final affirmation, after having received answers. The contrast between these verses is startling. It is a contrast between a wail of despair and a shout of confidence.”²

The lament of the prophet Habakkuk is echoed in this post-modern era from pulpits all over the church world. With a rise in social injustices and an era that believes in anything that the mind can conjure up; modern day prophets call out to God in much the same manner as the prophet Habakkuk in biblical times. Irrespective of mission or Christian efforts to meet the needs of people around the globe violence persists everywhere.

¹ Thomas Constable, “Notes on Habakkuk,” Sonic Light, accessed March 28, 2013, <http://www.soniclight.com>.

² John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck, and J. Ronald Blue, ed. “Habakkuk,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1505.

From wars and ‘rumors of wars’ to human trafficking there seems to be a barrage of injustice worldwide. Christian Judea principles are under attack. Satisfaction occurring from ‘beams of light that guide behavior,’ positive thinking, and self-worship of a carnal mindset have created an ‘atypical’ whirlwind of emotional crutches to substitute for Christ. It is no wonder that the lament of prophet Habakkuk and those of post-modern pastors, seem to echo one another. The wicked still prosper and there seems no end to their folly, while those who seek to uphold typical Christian values are ridiculed and murdered. Is God once again using the wicked to set up the future for glory? Is that why those who despise righteousness worship those things that bring them monetary wealth, while forsaking their own eternal souls? Yet, as in the days of prophet Habakkuk, God is still calling the righteous to remain righteous in the midst of their troubles.

At a time that correlates so closely with that of prophet Habakkuk, these scriptures are relevant to our postmodern day and we must “write down the revelation and make it plain on tables,” (Habakkuk 2:2). The difference lies only in the ability to communicate the revelations of God as an intimate part of the individual Christian believer’s life. The historical background, noted in the text, was centered in Judea:

The people to whom Habakkuk ministered were Judeans who apparently lived under the reign of King Jehoiakim. During his reign the Israelites were looking for help in the wrong places, Egypt and Assyria, in view of growing Babylonian power. They should have been looking to the Lord primarily, and their failure to do so was one of the burdens of Jeremiah, Habakkuk’s contemporary. Habakkuk’s concerns were more philosophical, however. What disturbed him was that the sovereign Lord was not

responding to Habakkuk's evil generation and its internal injustices.³

Other Bible scholars have noted how little, we know about Habakkuk and other prophets. “We know equally little about his seventh-century B.C. contemporaries Nahum and Zephaniah. The meaning of his name is questionable. It may come from the Hebrew verb *habaq*, which means “to fold the hands” or “to embrace.”⁴ The genealogy of the prophet Habakkuk, according to the article “Notes on Habakkuk” state that, “According to rabbinic sources, Habakkuk was the son of the Shunammite woman whom Elisha restored to life (2 Kings 4). The basis for this theory is that Elisha's servant told the woman that she would “embrace” a son (2 Kings 4:16), and Habakkuk's name is similar to the Hebrew word for “embrace.”⁵ The dates in which the book was authored are inconsistent:

On the one hand, Habakkuk announced the Babylonians' rise to prominence as if it would be a surprise (1:5-6). . . . On the other hand, the prophecy seems to assume the Babylonians had already built a reputation as an imperialistic power (see 1:6-11, 15-17; 2:5-17). . . . Perhaps the best way to resolve the problem is to understand the book as a collection of messages from different periods in the prophet's career.⁶

“Another writer believed that some of the oracles date from before 605 B.C., while others came after 597 B.C., and that the final form of the book reflects Habakkuk's post-

³ Thomas Constable, “Notes on Habakkuk,” Sonic Light, accessed March 28, 2013, <http://www.soniclight.com>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., *Handbook on the Prophets* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 433.

597 B.C. Perspective.”⁷ The central theme of the text, according to the Holman Bible

Handbook notes that:

Prophets often compared themselves to city watchmen, whose responsibility was to report approaching danger or messengers (see 2 Sam. 18:24; Isa. 21:6–9; 52:8; Jer. 6:17; Ezek. 3:17; Hos. 9:8). Their job was to watch for a message from the Lord and deliver it to the people. That role here assumed by Habakkuk suggests that he was not the only one who needed to hear the answers to his questions. “Complaint” in 2:1 is from the same root as “punish/reproof” in 1:12. Habakkuk was not demanding an answer from God but was expecting reproof or correction for his audacious remarks, knowing that God’s ways are always right. He knew that a solution to his perplexity could come only from God and that whatever God said would demand and deserve a response from him.⁸

Prophet Habakkuk’s ‘audacious’ remarks were intentional and if the theologians were correct, he risked “reproach or correction” from God. The prophet engaged God in such a way as a desperate attempt to gain a reaction from God. Those who have adopted this methodology as postmodern clergy are called ‘change-agents’ and find they must do likewise. Challenging the very promises of God – holding Christ to the gospel text and flat out daring God to react, is a risky task that requires holy boldness from the modern day prophet better known as the servant leaders of the church.

Although centuries have past, the rationale for such bold moves remains the same: to motivate the God we serve to reveal the plan for the ages. This risky business is apart of a greater faith-level and what I believe God loves about humankind. We were created a “little lower than the Angels” so that we could possess free will. Free will when used to move toward God is a great

⁷ O. Palmer Robertson, “The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah,” in *New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 212-214.

⁸ David S. Dockery, *Holman Bible Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 1992), 488.

demonstration of our commitment; but when used to move away from God, it can be devastating to our spiritual well being. So, 'free will' has great potential to cause great sin.

God created everything, including the evil enemy. Perhaps, creation came in levels or waves, each new wave a little less powerful than the previous. When the enemy was created, it was done with divine power like other angels and so humankind was created after without divine power. In this way, our 'free will' would not have eternal consequences as before. Perhaps the change agents of the past and present are apart of a larger plan and share a spiritual lineage.

Throughout the biblical text there are examples of this type of 'change-agent' faith. In the Book of Daniel, the three Hebrews risked the fire furnace because they refused to give up faith in their God. Rather than worship King Nebuchadnezzar, they explained that even if their God did not save them they would not bow down and worship the idol. It is this type of faith that gets the attention of a God that is encouraging a 'all-or-nothing commitment' of the creation to stand up in opposition to unrighteousness, even at the risk of God's wrath.

Standing up for God often means standing up to God by challenging the very essence of the promise. Habakkuk knew, like current servant leaders that God would not rescind the promise, so they stepped out on blind faith of God's innate goodness. Explaining this reasoning to an unbelieving population opens the prophets of old and modern day to ridicule and can appear to add to the resources that denounce the gospel.

It is a bold stance to ask others to openly negate social opinion and grasp their faith by not only holding to their beliefs, but also to use it as an authority to plan their future. “Write down the revelation” for your life is to make it plain enough to run with it towards your future in Christ. Knowing that the revelation will manifest in the midst of social doubt is the ultimate faith walk. Holding God to the gospel text in a postmodern era is surely challenging the promises that are made. These scriptures are a perfect fit for this project that uses God’s revelation, and promises, in accordance to the believer’s faith, to dictate a Life Plan that guides the actions of a postmodern Christian.

Although there are several prophetic books and commentaries note, the Book of Habakkuk is distinguished. “Unlike other prophets who declared God’s message to people this prophet dialogued with God about people. Most Old Testament prophets proclaimed divine judgment. Habakkuk pleaded for divine judgment. In contrast with the typical indictment, this little book records an intriguing interchange between a perplexed prophet and his Maker.”⁹ While the Book of Habakkuk appears firmly rooted, it identifies its own fallibility.

Because of the way he gains his knowledge ..., Habakkuk takes the reader into the council of God (cf. Jer 23:18) and demonstrates the process of how God ‘reveals His plan to His servants the prophets’ (Amos 3:7). Therefore, Habakkuk serves as revealer, interpreter, and guide, even as he fulfills the traditional function of a prophet (2:1).” Armerding describes Habakkuk’s role as “discharged in attentive, reverent prayer by the same conscientious watchfulness and persistence demanded of the literal watchman.” The vision he looked to see was something God would say, so that a close

⁹ John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck, and J. Ronald Blue, ed. “Habakkuk,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1505.

connection exists between prophetic seeing and prophetic saying. Visions could be transposed into sayings.¹⁰

The connection between what the prophet saw and what the prophet said is the connection between the promises of God and the manifestation of the promises in and for the people. The prophetic spirit of Habakkuk could not reconcile what he was seeing in the people of God and the lack of reaction from God, therefore, Habakkuk sought to clarify so that his vision would be clear. Postmodern theologians have examined the text to identify deeper meanings.

One aspect of the text references the tangible material of the “tablets” and the interpretation of its language: “A herald may run with it,” (Habakkuk 2:2–3). “The writing material is not identified in the verse though the word for “tablets” is the same as that used in Exodus to describe the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments.”¹¹

Questions surrounding the latter issue of “a herald may run with it” is more complicated: “The question is a disputed one, whether this command is to be understood literally or figuratively, “simply denoting the great importance of the prophecy, and the consequent necessity for it to be made accessible to the whole nation.”¹² The literal interpretation is substantiated by:

¹⁰ Kenneth L. Barker and Waylon Bailey, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 1999), 164-165.

¹¹ Ibid, 165.

¹² Carl Friedrich, Delitzsch Friedrich, and Franz Julius Keil, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes* (Peabody, MA: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 460.

The passages quoted in support of the literal view, i.e., of the actual writing of the prophecy which follows upon tables, viz., Isa. 8:1; 30:8, and Jer. 30:2, are not decisive. In Jer. 30:2 the prophet is commanded to write all the words of the Lord in a book (*sēpher*); and so again in Isa. 30:8, if *עַל־לִיּוֹן כְּתִיבָהּ* is synonymous with *תִּקְרָא עַל־סֵפֶר*. But in Isa. 8:1 there are only two significant words, which the prophet is to write upon a large table after having taken witnesses.¹³

Additionally, it is noted, “... that even the runner, one who hastens by hurriedly, may be able to read it, is not borne out by the Hebrew, which rather means that every one who reads it may run, *i.e.* read fluently and easily.”¹⁴ Figurative interpretation varies, but the interpretation that best correlates with this project is from Heflin who contends that, “the Hebrew here clearly puts the emphasis on the running of the reader, not the reading of the runner. ... It means that the person who reads the message will adopt it as a guide for living ... will run through life according to it.”¹⁵

The purpose of the project is that those creating their individual Life-Plan using Christian principles and values will do so based on their personal revelations from God. In addition, it was hypothesized that others they encounter may also benefit and be converted after reading and determining the authenticity and authority of God through the eyes of its author. What greater fulfillment for the Christian believer than to fulfill the “Great Commission of Christ” by drawing others through exhibiting God’s power and authority? Throughout history God has used the lives of the people of faith to demonstrate power and authority. Not only does writing the plan on the modern-day

¹³ Carl Friedrich, Delitzsch Friedrich, and Franz Julius Keil, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes* (Peabody, MA: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 400.

¹⁴ H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., “Habakkuk,” in *The Pulpit Commentary* (New York, NY: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1909), 22-23.

¹⁵ Kenneth L. Barker and Waylon Bailey, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 1999), 20.

tablets we use denote faith, but clearly demonstrates to all that inquire that God is still alive and in control.

The social engagement of the text is aligned with the contention of the project, “The prophet asked some of the most penetrating questions in all literature, and the answers are basic to a proper view of God and his relation to history. If God’s initial response sounded the death knell for any strictly nationalistic covenant theology of Judah, his second reply outlined in a positive sense the fact that all history was hastening to a conclusion that was [as] certain as it was satisfying.”¹⁶

Today’s translation indicates that if you conceptually believed in God, but continued to offer homage to other possible sources, God’s second reply will bring the wavering Christian to a full commitment and assurance of the authority and power of the God that they serve. The promises of God will be sustained for not only the righteous, but the unrighteous as well. The deeds against the innocent will be answered with justice and those that build their wealth on the sacrifice of their victims will be repaid with disaster. Once again, the glory of God will restore proper order according to the biblical text we utilize to restore and expand our individual lives to victory.

Time reveals all mysteries, whether in the Seventh Century or postmodern era.

The Expositor’s Bible Commentary notes it like this:

In the interim, while history is still awaiting its conclusion (and Habakkuk was not told when the end would come, apparently for him prefigured by Babylon’s destruction), the righteous ones are to live by faith. The faith prescribed—or ‘faithfulness,’ as many have argued that *’emunah*’ should be translated—is still called for as a basic response to the unanswered questions in today’s universe; and

¹⁶ Thomas Constable, “Notes on Habakkuk,” Sonic Light, accessed March 28, 2013, <http://www.soniclight.com>.

it is this, a theology for life both then and now, that stands as Habakkuk's most basic contribution.¹⁷

Thomas Constable summarizes it in another way: “If Zephaniah stressed humility and poverty of spirit as prerequisites for entering into the benefits of the company of the believing, Habakkuk demanded faith as the most indispensable prerequisite. But these are all part of the same picture.”¹⁸ Faith, in the face of atypical and emotionally rationale feelings of belief, is as dramatic as “poverty of spirit” in the midst of self-worship of talents and intelligence.

The paradoxical nature of the text (faith in the midst of heightened destructive risk) aligns itself nicely with the paradoxical challenge of this project. Is it feasible to use the authority given by faith, even when the environment does not align with the focus of your faith? The postmodern environment of an ‘atypical theory’ says that there are no absolutes and few tangibles in spiritual reality. However, can the Christian who defies their current environment by holding onto their fundamental beliefs utilize this authority to set a path that the non-Christian community can see (but cannot access) for their lives?

New Testament

This project draws upon the theology of liberation, by its use of Luke 13:10–17, which states,

On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said

¹⁷ Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, eds., “Habakkuk,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 495-496.

¹⁸ Thomas Constable, “Notes on Habakkuk,” Sonic Light, accessed March 28, 2013, <http://www.soniclight.com>.

to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God. Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue leader said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath." The Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie your ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?" When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing.

This is the story of a woman stricken with a deformity for eighteen years who is restored instantly by her faith through Jesus, the Christ. Jesus performs this miracle while in the midst of legalism by speaking truth to power and challenging the traditions of the day.

Form Criticism analyzes the text by stating, "The acts of healing are not described as interruptions of causal connections within natural law, but rather as manifestations of the kingdom of God in the struggle of the powers."¹⁹ Bible scholars examine the text to identify the focus of the Pharisee's complaint of what should have been a welcomed miracle moment:

the loosing of Satan's bonds (Luke 4:18; 13:16; cf. Mark 3:27; 7:35), and always an eschatological event, marked as such by Jesus' preference for healing on the sabbath (Mark 3:4; Luke 13:16; 14:3; John 5:9; 9:14): The eschaton is "sabbath" time (Isa 61:1f. and Luke 4:19; Matt 11:28). Jesus' conflict with the Pharisees regarding the sabbath reveals two different understandings of *θεραπεύω*: The Evangelists use the word of (eschatological, prophetically proclaimed [cf. Isa 26:19; 35:5ff.; 53:4; 61:1ff.]) saving event (Luke 13:13, 16; cf. John 5:9ff.; 9:14ff.); the Pharisees think of a secular medical activity, one forbidden on the sabbath (Luke 13:14; cf. John 5:9ff.; 9:14ff.)²⁰

Again 'Form Criticism' seeks to identify the author of the Book of Luke:

Several factors indicate that the writer of this Gospel was the same person who

¹⁹ Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 144.

²⁰ Ibid.

wrote the Book of Acts. First, a man named "Theophilus" was the recipient of both books (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1). Second, Acts refers to a previous work by the same writer. Third, both books have several common themes, some of which do not receive the same emphasis elsewhere in the New Testament. Fourth, there are general structural and stylistic similarities, including the use of chiasms and the tendency to focus on specific individuals. The writer also acquired his knowledge of Jesus' life and ministry from research rather than from eyewitness observations (Luke 1:1-4). Therefore he was not one of the disciples who traveled with Jesus.²¹

The *African-American New Testament Commentary* denotes the summary of the central theme to be that "Dedication to God leads to meeting human need, while dedication to religion protects the tradition even at the cost of human life."²² This is addressed by focusing on "Again reinterpreting the meaning of the Sabbath as a time "to set the captive free and let the oppressed go free."²³ Other commentaries denote, "The main doctrines of systematic theology that Luke stressed were Christology, soteriology (especially redemption), pneumatology, angelology, and eschatology."²⁴ Previous pericope's support this theme and systematic theology:

There are several thematic connections that tie this pericope with what just preceded, and that show its role in the development of Luke's argument. Jesus had just called the nation to repentance (vv. 3, 5). Now He showed that change was possible with His power. He had pictured Israel in need of fruit (vv. 6-8). Now He illustrated His restorative powers. He had called the people to believe in Him (12:54-59). Now He gave them a sign that He was the Messiah. He had called the multitudes "hypocrites" because they refused to respond to the clear evidence before them (12:56). Now He called them "hypocrites" again, because

²¹ Thomas Constable, "Notes on Habakkuk," Sonic Light, accessed March 28, 2013, <http://www.soniclight.com>.

²² Trent Butler, "Luke," in *Holman New Testament Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2000), 225.

²³ Brian K. Blount et al., eds., *True to Our Native Land: An African-American New Testament Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 172.

²⁴ Thomas Constable, "Notes on Habakkuk," Sonic Light, accessed March 28, 2013, <http://www.soniclight.com>.

they refused to act to relieve suffering on the Sabbath (v. 15).²⁵

Howard Marshall in “The Gospel of Luke” analyzes the healing story by stating,

The praising of God by the healed person is a motif not found in the similar stories in 6:10; 14:4, but is found in Acts 3:8f.; it may be due to Luke, but is entirely appropriate in the synagogue setting. The healing story has reached its climax, and by the rules of form criticism could end at this point. But as in other cases the sign wrought by Jesus becomes the occasion of controversy and teaching.²⁶

Jesus addressed not just the surface issues of healing, bondage and letter of the Law of Moses, but went deeper to expose social prejudices and customs by looking at the role of women of the day. Howard Marshall continues his analysis of the social issues being challenged by the text by indicating, “For Jesus, although she is a woman she is nevertheless a descendant of Abraham.”²⁷ Howard Marshall continues his analysis of the “... social issues being like Zacchaeus (19:9) a member of Gods people (Acts 13:26).”²⁸

Social reaction and expectations reveal the atmosphere in which Jesus, the Christ was ministering. The healing of the woman, a member of the tribe of Israel should have been a joyous occasion at any time, but “Everything but praise came from the man who had allowed Jesus to teach in the synagogue. Filled with righteous indignation, he

²⁵ Victor Paul Furnish, ed., “Israel in Luke – Acts: A Tragic Story,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, no. 1, (March 1985) 157-58.

²⁶ Howard Marshall, *New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Nottingham, UK: Paternoster Press 1985), 157.

²⁷ Howard Marshall, *New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Nottingham, UK: Paternoster Press 1985), 158.

²⁸ Ibid.

called Jesus' hand: "How can you dare break our law?"²⁹ Seizing the opportunity to teach a lesson in compassion, Christ used this juncture to re-prioritize the true meaning of the Sabbath. Truth came to the Jews first, but their inability to see past the Mosaic Law rendered them unable to embrace mercy – even in the face of a healing miracle. Had circumstances been different, the synagogue teacher probably would have been more compassionate regarding the miracle, but it is thought that Jesus' conduct reflected upon their leadership.

The policy of the time dictated that the temple leader be held responsible for its conduct and effectiveness:

The ruler of the synagogue was in charge of synagogue worship. He was the president of the organization, often being its founder. He led the meetings of the organization. In Jewish society this official was highly respected and esteemed. He chose the persons who led in worship and assigned them their role in the worship service. He was in charge of building the synagogue and keeping it in order. At times this meant the ruler of the synagogue had to bear the financial burden for the building.³⁰

For these reasons, the leader of the synagogue worship had probably allowed Jesus to teach that day; therefore his indignation may have been in part due to his own exposure to scrutiny. For this same reason, this may have also been Christ's rationale for teaching in the temple, "... It was Christ's practice and teaching in regard to the Sabbath that excited the more furious opposition of the

²⁹ Trent Butler, "Luke," in *Holman New Testament Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2000), 221.

³⁰ Trent Butler, "Luke," in *Holman New Testament Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2000), 221.

Pharisees...”³¹

Whatever the rationale, the expectation and response from the people that had come to learn that morning told the underlying story. As Mosaic Law gave way to divine intervention, the children of Abraham found their faith once again activated by the miracles of God. As promised, God had sent the Messiah to fight and defend those under oppression, even from their own religious leaders:

Hushed silence fell over the crowd. Jesus had humiliated the synagogue and religious leaders. Then praise and joy broke out. The crowd recognized what he was doing for people, especially the little people who had no other defender against the religious system and the political maneuvering. They liked to see someone beat the system. Even more, they liked to see someone who cared for and helped the little people in society. They recognized that the things he was doing were glorious, which seems to indicate they knew these were divine acts (see 7:25; cf. Exod. 34:10).³²

New Testament relevance to this project is that like Jesus who spoke truth to power in an environment of ‘convenient belief,’ we must do the same today. Jesus used human affliction to unveil hidden agendas in the synagogue of ancient days where teaching by Pharisees and other religious leaders taught ‘convenient belief.’ Truth to power or speaking out to those in power negates the convenient belief that allow control based on laws that benefited social agendas, while limiting the power of those being oppressed.³³ Truth to power cannot be deterred by convenience or delayed to enhance social or political agendas, but if effective must be spoken timely, in alignment with the correction needed.

³¹ John Bond, “The Gospel According to St. Luke,” in *Classic Commentaries on the Greek New Testament* (London, England: MacMillian, 1890), 128.

³² Trent Butler, “Luke,” in *Holman New Testament Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2000), 221–222.

³³ *Urban Dictionary*, 1st ed., s.v. “truth to power,” accessed January 6, 2015, www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=speak%20truth%20to%power.

Jesus, the Christ spoke not just to the infirmity of the woman's body, but also to the infirmity that infected the social platform of the day. In spite of the fact that the woman was a faithful believer a “daughter of Abraham,” she would be denied a healing in order to keep a religious law as a priority. Jesus saw not just the healing that was needed in body, but the healing in the spirits of those who were followers of God.

The New Testament covenant brought to the Jews was the enactment of the Spirit of the law over legalism or the Letter of the Law. Although Moses has taught laws that were intended to help the Jews to follow God easier, they had been corrupted and elevated as a priority over the very people they were suppose to help. Consequently, the distortion by the teachers of the law had caused hurt to the chosen people. Jesus, the Christ spoke truth to power and revealed the true intention or Spirit of the Law of Moses to assist all to live as God commanded.

In conclusion, this project uses the theologies of prophecy and liberation to correlate its purpose to those of the biblical text. Just as the prophet Habakkuk sought answers from God concerning the issues of his time, we too must seek God in our plans for the future. In the Old Testament text Habakkuk 2:2-3, God answers, “Then the Lord replied: Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets So that a herald may run with it. For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; It will certainly come and will not delay.”

Write down the revelation and make it plain so that others may also benefit from it, is as much a remedy for the biblical world as it is today in this postmodern era. Ironically, the communicative device we may use in this modern day is a source of

communicating globally as well. This should enable even further purpose of revelation in that it allows conversion by others after realizing the truth of the text as revealed through the eyes of its author. Our runner is a ‘world-wide-web’ vehicle that serves an even larger population. Indeed, the revelation of God still comes at an appointed time and will not prove false. Though it still may linger, without a doubt Christians know that the triumph of the last days are inevitable.

The New Testament text Luke 13:10 – 17, align with the post-modern quest of truth and whether the customs of the day should overshadow the biblical values taught.

“On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, “Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.” Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God. Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue leader said to the people, “There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath.” The Lord answered him, “You hypocrites! Doesn’t each of you on the Sabbath untie your ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?” When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing (Luke 13:10–17).

These two scriptures identify the continued challenge of the church, while revealing the question of purpose in a postmodern context.

More than twenty centuries have past and people still debate the Sabbath.

Whether the question is which day, what its purpose is or if it really exists, the subject remains a controversy. All too often the postmodern society is forcing Christians to choose whom they will serve by scheduling events at times that conflict with traditional worship times.

In addition, to the Sabbath and its usage, the rights and value of women are also still on the table worldwide. The women bent over for eighteen years became the focus of the question: what is the value of the female, even if apart of the chosen group? As those 'grafted into the chosen culture' we wrestle with the worth of female gender and their value particularly when their needs conflict with the needs of those of the controlling groups.

In Habakkuk a disillusioned prophet is told by God to write the vision and then proceeds to validate the promises that have been made. There would be restoration of a people chosen by God and protected by God since the days of Exodus. This instruction comes in spite of the current status of the chosen people who were being disobedient and apathetic to the voice of God. For this reason there was a warning of an initial captivity and then an overtaking of the chosen people by a nation known for its wartime destruction.

In the same way Habakkuk had to rely on the faithfulness of God in times that the outcome seemed to teeter on disaster; so we too are faced with a postmodern environment that is anti-God. Today, individualism has replaced dependence on divine guidance with efforts that seek to create a god-like ego in the individual. As in days of old, prophets of today must also learn to use their spiritual senses instead of leaning on their own understanding regarding life.

Standing on the merits and expectation of the Christian faith is not an option, but rather is mandatory, irrespective of the surrounding environment or what appears to be a logical conclusion. Faith is the oxymoron of Christianity: without faith it is impossible to access the authority of God, yet the more dyer the situation, the more difficult it may

be to draw upon faith. For most Christians the day-to-day grind of life can take them away from the time spent in a relationship with God; therefore faith may waver depending on how much time is allotted to spend in dialogue with God. Fortunately, in spite of negligence, the purpose of creation warrants divine intervention, thereby, allowing God to push us past our circumstances into faith.

Jesus, in the New Testament text, speaks truth to power when he seizes an opportunity to teach in the local temple. Jesus engages in the social politics of the day as he draws a correlation between the common injustice to women and how their welfare is less a priority than the maintenance of a field animal. Speaking truth to power is the main theme of this doctoral project, because postmodern Christians must speak the unpopular biblical view in spite of conflicting worldviews.

In a postmodern context where there are few absolutes, society continues to position itself to pass judgment on what it cannot prove. In the United States, society is consistently growing more anti-Christian in spite of the fact that sciences have been unable to disprove the biblical text. Decades of decreasing numbers in attendance to traditional churches have given way to self-teaching of the biblical text, that in turn has distorted the teachings of Christ to accommodate social objectives, much like Luke 13:10-17. The obvious affect is decreasing effectiveness, so that faith, like many other belief systems and intangibles, is subject to scrutiny because it cannot be understood through natural senses.

Other religions and sects claim to have similar power as Christianity without proof, while Christianity is deemed false in the face of documented past results. This has led to the common belief that there are multiple ways to access 'God' other than

through Jesus, the Christ. So, what seems to be in question is not that a higher power exists; but what is required to reach this power.

To further blur the lines and distinctions of Christianity from other religions, any religious organization can establish a 'church,' without clear distinction. This fact means that as long as an organization takes on some of the superficial attributes of what a misinformed postmodern society believes is Christianity; it is labeled a church. The unsuspecting person looking for Christ in an anti-Christ environment is taken in under false pretenses. Regardless of their name, if these organizations are not teaching Christian doctrine that elevates biblical principles and Jesus, the Christ as the only pathway to God.

When doctrine is elevated above Christ (along with whatever justifications have been developed) it is not Christianity even if it is labeled church. The result is a person with the title Christian believer, who doubts the authority of Christ, thereby substituting the ways of Christ with individualism. The end results are people who profess to be Christian that worship their own images, therefore themselves.

Our anthropology dictates that we act like human beings, so it is not long before we begin to recruit others and profess to be experts in religion. When trust in self is measured against faith in God, there can be no comparison. Disillusionment, hurt feelings and despair often prevent those who have suffered loss under false prophets (those leading them astray in the name of God) from entering the church again. These feelings spill over into society and gives power to the postmodern anti-Christian environment.

This doctoral project does not eliminate false prophets, does not redefine the lines of Christianity, nor does it seek to devalue other religions. This doctoral project merely seeks to tap into the power of God through faith in Jesus, the Christ. Jesus spoke truth to power when he openly challenged the fundamental law surrounding the Sabbath. This project, speaks truth to power in that it openly tests some of the fundamental beliefs in Christianity: predestined purpose, divine provision and Holy Spirit guidance. As Jesus brought attention to an obvious defect in the infirmed woman for eighteen years, this project draws attention to the obvious brokenness of the church. Like Jesus, we do not address the situation of those who do not believe, but rather in those who do profess to believe.

Jesus knew that under the power of God, whatever he touched would be made whole, and this project accesses the same power through the scriptures – that is the word of God. The fundamental belief in Christianity rests in the faith that the scriptures are true, that the word of God does not return void and that the purpose for existence can be revealed through the guiding of the Holy Spirit and scriptures given by God. There is no magic being utilized, other than the mysteries of the biblical authority of the text. Instead, a broader methodology is being sought that would liberate those who are bound by social injustices by enabling their access to the true spirit that demonstrates faith and is illustrated in God's texts.

As Jesus, the Christ prepared parables that taught the spirit of the law; rather than the letter of the law – postmodern church organizations must develop a framework for teaching the spirit of God's purpose for our lives and not just the legalities of having it. We could continue to use the trial and error method (learning from the aftermath of

trials), but why should we? The result of trial and error methodology can only at best result in success that is the aftermath of tragedy. Instead, the Christian community of faith must seek innovative methods that capitalize on postmodern advancements to reinvent its primary tools for discipleship and conversion. Our Lord, Jesus, the Christ has already provided the lessons necessary to guide us in the discovery of our purpose and the godly will for our lives.

Within the biblical text are the tools needed to find the purpose God has for each individual. Our task is to design a framework for utilizing these tools, producing a finished document called an individual Christian Life Plan. This framework must be developed and designed for the church, so that individual Christians may use the text given by God, and revelation from the Holy Spirit, to develop their plan. This is done in the midst of living in a postmodern context that questions everything and seeks validation of nothing. The key becomes the ability of the church to demonstrate the power of the biblical text and to diminish the resistance from secular sources.

The framework for a discipleship tool only becomes relevant if the church itself is purposed about building Disciples for Christ. This means that every aspect of the life of the family of faith organization must have a centralized theme that leads to increasing the faith and level of discipleship for each of its members. The leader of the organization, regardless of what title they possess must take on this same attribute if the process is to be a success.

In order to attach the necessary aggression to reach this goal, it must also extend outside the walls of the local family of faith congregation. Seminaries that train postmodern leaders must set an example of this strategy even in the midst of achieving

secular accreditations and ratings that increase their overall fiscal foundation. There can be no substitute for the enactment of a strategy to repackage Discipleship and conversion as the primary target to be obtained within the church's sphere of influence.

It is not enough to simply pray and hope for results but each level of training and growth of the family of faith must show commitment to the standards and values that make up the definition of Discipleship. Social agendas and civic engagement cannot become substitutes for theological training and dissemination of the biblical text. Championing the causes of the marginalized, underprivileged and misunderstood must not be allowed to undermine the traditional principles that are inherent to the power of the biblical text.

While maintaining a fundamental platform for truth, each level must be careful to continue to uncover the fact rather than assumptions based on social agendas. The burden of the project is to assure that the biblical text is provided in an uncompromised fashion so that the power of the text may be relevant in the life of the new convert of existing member seeking discipleship. The power of the text is sufficient within its own realm in order to do the job that is necessary for the transformation of the person. If we, as the family of faith, believe the power of the text we can easily speak truth to power.

Speaking truth to power means that we challenge God to be God and then document the results as they impact the lives of the individual believers. Challenging the promises of God by submission to the authority of God is faith at a new level. Postmodern leaders of church organizations that follow Christ irrespective of social agendas and platforms must depend upon the miracles of the divine. As instruments and

tools for use by God we must believe in the power of God first hand in order to transfer that belief to our congregations.

The tragedy of the church is when the leader of the church fails to deliver the message because of they doubt. Modeling discipleship is the greatest leverage that any Servant-Leader can possess. In all they do they must exhibit integrity and character so that the congregations entrusted to them may grow in faith and become true Disciples.

Writing the revelation is writing the plan according to the revelation given by God to the individual Christian developing the plan. Planning in a postmodern era takes on new dimensions when you consider the technological advancements that are available. Electronic medium allows others to read the plan and its contents almost immediately and with the ease of clicking a button. The convenience and accessibility of social media can maximize the benefit and may enable conversion as the reader observes the power of God. Speaking truth to power is the ability to speak truth in the midst of other's doubt regarding subjects revealed by God.

Stating the obvious is not always a popular activity, especially in an environment that seeks to devalue the very essence of your authoritarian source. Both notions (truth to power and writing the revelation) remain relevant 2000 years after introduced by Christ because God remains relevant and in authority - yesterday, today and forever.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATION

Enabling the conversion and discipleship of unbelievers was commission by Jesus, the Christ prior to his crucifixion and has been an issue since that time. Making disciples of those who know little or nothing of the ways of the Christ is a mission that continues as a fundamental purpose of the church. With the number of unbelievers continuing to rise, the traditional denominational church finds itself looking for more effective ways to complete the commission of Christ. In a postmodern era that not only questions the existence of God, but also embraces the notion of multiple gods, we are brought full circle to the challenges that faced Apostle Paul as he ministered to new believers in Corinth. Although postmodern technology possess tools that allow the message of Christ to be broadcast with new potential, membership in mainline churches continue to decline. Use of technology, such as “live streaming,” can enable Christ’s salvific message to reach millions globally, so why does the traditional membership roles continue to diminish. It is not that the God of creation has ceased calling the created, because conversion continues to happen throughout the world. So the question is, why are denominational churches in the United States continuing to loose members? If conversion continues by the ‘draw of Christ’ onto the creation; then is ‘the call’ in jeopardy or the venue for which ‘the call’ is received? Since God has not stopped calling

the unbelievers to the family of faith, could it be that the family of faith has ceased to provide a sufficient model to cultivate discipleship of Christian – Judeo ways for life? In the postmodern environment where there are atypical theologies, alternative lifestyles and no-fault religions can the traditional church afford to hold onto outdated methodologies for teaching the biblical text and principles. If the environment for learning has changed, so must the traditional church methodology, without compromising the biblical principles being taught. Although more and more churches are taking advantage of postmodern technology, they continue to keep the messages geared to elevating those who have significant church history. In a world where persons are taught individuality over teamwork and self-serving values, can the traditional church continue to affect change through its legalistic ideologies? If Jesus, the Christ came with a new covenant that graphs in all persons who believe, why are the fundamental methodologies of Christian elitism still being practiced?

Historical literary research, within appropriate disciplines, provides a wider view of the basic understanding of the subject, through the reflection of scholars as they convey their working theories and how they impact their worldview. Conversion is the lynchpin to the soteriological message of the Bible, therefore, is timeless in value. As far back as Abraham, God has been calling the creation to participate in worship, transformation and the work of God's hands through this act of conversion. Merriam-Webster defines convert as: “ ... to change from one form or function to another; to alter for more effective utilization; to appropriate without right.”¹ The same dictionary defines

¹ *Merriam Webster Dictionary*, s.v. “convert,” accessed October 19, 2013, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/convert?show=0&t=1382209840>.

disciple as: “someone who accepts and assists in spreading the doctrines of another,” so discipleship in the church has come to mean “... the work of discipling others and preparing them for leadership roles.”² In order to view the subject in a broad spectrum, the following disciplines have been examined for researching the impact and their understanding of conversion and or discipleship. For the purpose of this project the disciplines examined are education, psychology, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, religious education and ministry.

Education is defined as “... a field of study that deals with the methods and problems of teaching...”³ One significant problem of teaching is intent. Since teaching is the conveying of information from an instructor in such a way as to provide understanding and comprehension for the learner, which allows the learner to effectively use the information, the human factor has ample opportunity to invade the process.

... ‘pedagogy’ [which] is often interpreted as a ‘teaching’ method rather than a philosophy or a social theory. ... by those educators who believe that education is neutral as they engage in a social construction of not seeing. ... they willfully refuse to understand that the very term “pedagogy” ... has Greek roots, meaning “to lead a child” ... Thus, as the term pedagogy illustrates, education is inherently directive and must always be transformative.⁴

Transformation is essential for discipleship of new believers in the family of faith.

Though the church, nor its members effect ‘the call’ of God, they are instrumental in guiding new Christians into discipleship or in following of the principles taught by Jesus.

² John MacArthur, "Foreword," in *Practical Wisdom for Pastors: Words of Encouragement and Counsel for a Lifetime of Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 142.

³ *Merriam Webster Dictionary*, s.v. “convert,” accessed October 19, 2013, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/convert?show=0&t=1382209840>.

⁴ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, translated by Ramos, Myra B. (New York, NY: The Continuum International Publishing Group, Inc., 2008), 24.

It is our very nature as human beings to want others to think as we do. Intent, speaks to the subjectivity of the instructor (or institution of learning) and their rational for their instruction. Since it is human nature to promote your own status and agenda; this underlying factor is conveyed along with the information to the learner through the process of education. This is true in the general secular education as well as in the Christian education taught within the church.

Christian education is the fundamental way of transferring the principals, morals and value of the Christian doctrine to the members of the church. As new believers are brought into the church, they receive their initial indoctrination through the method of Christian education. Whether it is new members class, Sunday school, Bible study or catechism, information about the Christian doctrine is conveyed through the eyes of people who have committed to a particular viewpoint or doctrine and teach others with the underlying purpose of sustaining that doctrine. John H. Aukerman states that “Rather than building on a Bible that talks about Jesus, Wesleyan Christian education begins with the living Christ who is revealed in the Bible. ... Christian education must be profoundly biblical, but the focus is on Jesus Christ, not the Bible that reveals him to us.”⁵ For those of the same religious background, the information transfers with minimal difficulty; but for those who lack a religious culture, the transfer of information takes on challenges.

Teaching new believers to engage in mature believers methodology is ineffective at best. An example is that if an adult says ‘car’ to a child, there is a level of understanding; yet it is incomplete. When a driving adult thinks of a car, they can understand its complex make-up as a mode of transportation that must be handled with

⁵ John H. Aukerman, *Discipleship That Transforms: An Introduction to Christian Education from a Wesleyan Holiness Perspective* (Anderson, IL: Warner Press, 2011), 1.

care. The child or young person without knowledge of driving also can relate to the 'car' being a mode of transportation; but fails to see the complexity of its use and how dangerous it can be. Just as we discourage the use of a car, by a non-driver without lessons, we must also discourage placing the responsibility of religious principles on people with no former training. "If students are not able to transform their lived experiences into knowledge and to use the already acquired knowledge as a process to unveil new knowledge, they will never be able to participate rigorously in a dialogue without any prior apprenticeship with the object of the knowledge and without any epistemological curiosity."⁶ We should remember that the new Christian without church history is much like the foreigner in a new land. They lack the reference in order to translate the new knowledge into a practical format because they have never seen the objective behavior modeled successfully. "When reflection focuses on premises (that is, why is this important in the first place?), it has the potential to lead to transformed meaning perspectives or changed ways of seeing the world. This is ... emancipatory learning - becoming free from forces that have limited our options, forces that have been taken for granted or seen as beyond our control."⁷ Defining this premise to the new Christian with no church history is a key element for the transformative learning that allows emancipatory learning. Legalistic methodologies that attack lineage can be detrimental to the objectives in discipleship. A more affective stance may be to highlight the salvific message that reaches to all who believe in the Christ rather than to elevate generational behavior patterns of those churchied. Realizing that normality is subjective

⁶ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 19.

⁷ Patricia Cranton, *Professional Development as Transformative Learning: New Perspectives for Teachers of Adults* (San Francisco, CA Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers, 1996), 2.

to your environment will allow the new Christian to see beyond the lessons learned and help to ease the transformation of principles to a life with greater possibilities.

Acknowledging the lack of perfection in humankind in general will allow the new Christian a comfort zone that enables change. The fields of psychology and sociology have studied the conversion of people in faith traditions for decades.

Conversion is a process of religious change that takes place in a dynamic force field of people, events, ideologies, institutions, expectations, and orientations. ... (a) conversion is a process over time, not a single event; (b) conversion is contextual and thereby influences and is influenced by a matrix of relationships, expectations, and situations; and (c) factors in the conversion process are multiple, interactive, and cumulative.⁸

The act of conversion is not something that the church controls, but rather influences through its infrastructure and contextual makeup. It is the job of the church to provide an incubator for the growth of faith in the new believer that is life sustaining. Mature believers in the ways of Christ are to enable an environment of nurturing educational modeling. Conversion is just not a new belief in Christ, but the commitment that enables the new Christian to embrace the principles of Christ and abandon lifestyles that contradict. "Psychology considers transformation of the self, consciousness, and experience, in both objective and subjective aspects."⁹

"Sociologists examine the social and institutional aspects of traditions in which conversion takes place. They consider social conditions at the time of conversion, important relationships and institutions of potential converts."¹⁰ Church influence is

⁸ Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Hampshire, CT: Yale University Publishing, 1993), 5.

⁹ Ibid., 9.

¹⁰ Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Hampshire, CT: Yale University Publishing, 1993), 9.

invaluable when addressing the social aspects of conversion. One of the most difficult tasks of the process is the change in important relationships and social conditions. This explains the importance of friends and those who invite prospective converts or accompanying them as conversion candidates to worship. The act of turning toward godly principles requires that ungodly principles be abandoned, which usually includes the relationships that go along with them. For those uninvited new converts, life crisis may aid in their decisions.

Anthropology, which is the science of human beings and their ancestors in relation to their physical, environmental, social and cultural characteristics that happened parallel to biblical events and stories. This factor alone creates a correlation of events that uniquely intersect one another. “Like all the world religions Christianity represents a unique response to the problems of a plural world. Having originated in macrocosmic crisis, Christianity and the other world religions have developed distinctive institutions for controlling ethics, knowledge, and identity over time and space.”¹¹ Thus the church, a sub-society within a society, must be conscious of its responsibility to keep a clear vision of its mission. Conversion is the single greatest asset God has given the church; the church must be diligent in assuring its usage of this asset is exclusive to accomplishing the Great Commission as dictated by Christ. With great power comes great responsibility and with the instruction by humans comes the inclination for self-congratulation by those who have been commissioned to unselfishly make disciples.

Indeed, these religions are without parallel in human history. Political empires and economic systems have come and gone, but the world religions have survived. They are the longest lasting of civilization’s primary institutions. Their

¹¹ Robert W. Hefner, ed. *Conversion to Christianity: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transformation* (San Francisco, CA: University of California Press 1993), 34.

genius lies in their curious ability to renounce this world and announce another, more compelling and true. They relocate the divisive solidarities of language, custom, and region within a broader community and higher Truth.¹²

When the church community loses sight of its purpose, a gnostic worldview is created that paint current believers as chosen, rather than living in a state of grace obtainable by all. If the church becomes entitled, chosen or special where does that leave the unbeliever who becomes the new convert? Graphing into the faith is not always sufficient to ease the fears of the new Christian.

Often frightened by events beyond their control, new Christians fear that they will forever be characterized as pagan or secular. Nearly everything they have experienced is undermined according to the wisdom of those who claim to understand God. Irrespective of how hard they try or the amount of hours it includes, they fear being ostracized because of their lack of church history and embarrassed by the lack of church 'etiquette' of their family and relationships. The mere anthropology of humankind allows for negative behavior and self-gradation for life choices. So the demonization of those who exhibit these attributes does more harm than good and helps to confuse the new convert. It is no wonder that most newly converted, especially if converted at adulthood, leaves the church in the first year. The question becomes why do most, but not all, newly converted leave the church? Knowing the difference may be a key to finding a solution that increases church membership for the newly converted Christian.

Each person comes to the church with their own characteristics, and philosophy deems this is one answer to the question of why some leave and others don't. There are

¹² Robert W. Hefner, ed. *Conversion to Christianity: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transformation* (San Francisco, CA: University of California Press 1993), 34.

those who are open and responsive to life, while others remain closed and unresponsive, but how does it make a difference?

We can see them realistically, as an invitation and challenge to new hope for our own lives. This is more likely to happen if we realize two things: they can give so much only because they are open to receive, and they have become open because they have acknowledged and dealt with whatever makes them closed. Their abundance is not a private possession or a proud achievement but rather the outcome of an openness to life energies available to all of us. ... All of us are both open and closed. ... The issue is whether the closed stance or the open stance will be dominant in our lives.¹³

The significance to openness is a pivotal point in every aspect of life. For those who do not have immediate openness or have not yet learned to deal with what has made them closed often overcompensate for their own feelings of inadequacies which may manifest as arrogance. This type of arrogance acts as a repellent of the new way of life, not because it lacks effectiveness to protect the feelings of the one exhibiting the arrogance, but actually deters the intellectual submission of the heart necessary for transformation – all because they fear being seen as inadequate by others. Unfortunately, this perpetuates mischaracterization of those seeking to disciple and may deter further efforts. This responsiveness to the energies of life, or this openness, is not a characteristic of just an individual, but can also characterize a group. This type of openness is beneficial to the individual and those that encounter it in an institution or group.

One is participating in a flow and exchange of life energies that is going on always and everywhere. ... the vision of nature as transfigured is not so much a change in nature as a change in us - like blind persons suddenly seeing. ... The mutual heightening of life energy that occurs in encounters is sometimes even more intense in a group where most or all of the people are open. ... Sometimes a group can facilitate not only a momentary “lift” but an ongoing “high” as a mode of life. The sense of an abundance of life energy encourages people to be generous rather than self-protective, expansive rather than self-constrictive.

¹³ Donald Evans, *Spirituality and Human Nature* (New York, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), 317-318.

Openness to life energies involves openness not only to nature and other people but also to oneself. Each of us in our closedness has a secret yearning for a life that is full and rich and expansive. One essential element in openness is acceptance and forgiveness, not only of others, but also of ourselves.¹⁴

As the openness responds to the energies of life, therefore, the concept of closedness does the opposite by focusing the self-centeredness of an individual.

People differ considerably in the extent to which they are closed; that is, self-centered and self-preoccupied. Self-centeredness is very difficult to see in oneself. ... So in general the more self-centered we are, the less we are aware of it. ... These attitudes are pervasive stances of the ego personality which shape our responses to the universe as a whole and to each particular in it. ... “ego-strengths” ... are crucial in the process of psychotherapy, and that they are constituents of human fulfillment.¹⁵

In a perfect world, closedness could not occur in the church, in a place given to express the love of Christ that none would be lost. However, in our imperfect existence it occurs more often than we would like. Often those who do not want to appear to have issues with their ego mask it. Unfortunately, when those who lead in the church exhibit this type of behavior, there is a tendency for it to ‘trickle-down’ and to become apart of the culture of the organization. “The self-inflating fantasy of divinity is usually repressed but it is manifested in the way we each engage ourselves in various projects. ... “We are the center of the universe, and I am part of this ‘we.’”¹⁶ At this point the new Christian feels alienated as they seek to become apart of ‘the we’ with no church history, or frame of reference as utilized by the rest of the congregation.

Religious education is the subject of religion taught in postsecondary educational systems. These courses are focused on teaching the history and undergirding events of

¹⁴ Donald Evans, *Spirituality and Human Nature*, 324-326.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 18-20.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

the traditional Judeo-Christian experience. The subject of discipleship within the realm of postsecondary formal religious education, like philosophy, seeks to analyze and rationalize the varying poles of interpretation. They analyze not only the discipleship itself, but also the moral values that it underlines; thus becoming apart of the experience. Discipleship in the ways of Christ become ideals and viewpoints that dictate moral code, “Within the two fundamental horizons or world views there are conflicting interpretations concerning how we come to know value and what the status of these value judgments is.”¹⁷

“Supernaturalistic absolutism holds that an action is objectively right or wrong by references to God’s explicit will. As long as our religious-moral apprehensions find their source explicitly in God’s will for humanity, proponents of this theory reason, there is only one correct judgment that can be discerned.”¹⁸

Another interpretation is Intuitionistic Absolution. “In sum, moral knowing is true knowing of a reality independent of social-personal preferences and emotion. The sources for the real, true, or valuable always have reference to the invariant process of human self-transcendence in the operations of attentive experience, of intelligent understandings, of reasonable judgments, and of responsible deliberations.”¹⁹

Regardless of your ‘value-point’ or belief system regarding conversion, the moral commitment must be made, after ‘the draw’ or conversion of Christ. The rationalization of what is believed, its identifiable benefit to the candidate’s life and the inevitable

¹⁷ Stephen Happell, *Conversion and Discipleship* (Kitchener, Ontario: Fortress Press, 1986), 104.

¹⁸ Ibid., 106.

¹⁹ Stephen Happell, *Conversion and Discipleship* (Kitchener, Ontario: Fortress Press, 1986), 106.

commitment to its underlying moral code must intersect in the mind, heart and soul of the candidate before discipleship can take place. For this is the place of intersection of the variables that birth a new understanding and the place where intellect accepts the new practice and custom of the belief, "... practical knowledge is acquired in the crucible noetic praxis. ... Affective knowing refers to what could be called the apprehension of value through feelings as intentional responses. Response to value through our intentional feelings is indeed a mode of self-transcendence."²⁰

The events we know as conversion and or discipleship impacts every aspect of life for the new Christian and those they influence. For this reason, the topic has been analyzed psychologically, looked at socially, rationalized and observed by many different disciplines, but there is no industry closer to this topic than the church itself. Regardless of what discipline you follow or what your reaction may be, it is the clergy of the local church that deals directly most with the act of conversion. Discipleship and Conversion are the fundamental reasons for ninety percent of the activity of the local church, and the local minister is more familiar than most.

Dealing with the subjects of conversion and discipleship are different for the clergy than for the general local church. As clergy, their very demeanor is focused and purposed concerning these subjects. Where the general congregation and even the organizational supervisors have a commitment to the lives of those entering the church, the clergy has a direct investment of their own personal goals in every person they serve. Like the physician has a passion about medical industry and its contributions to society and dedicates their lives accordingly, the clergy has the same type of dedication and service to the church. Clergy of a local church is the intended worker for Christ in the

²⁰ Ibid., 107-108.

fulfillment of the Great Commission. It is the local clergy that is responsible for leading the mature Christians and establishing an environment that provides a safe space for nurturing new converts, while leading them to a life of discipleship.

Reverend Doctor David Haxton Carswell Read, a Scottish Presbyterian clergyman and author who served as Senior Minister at the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City from 1956 – 1989 notes that,

Believing with Karl Barth that the preacher should stand with the Bible in one hand and the morning newspaper in the other, his sermons, which might include quotes from Humpty Dumpty or Samuel Johnson, Shakespeare, Alice in Wonderland or James Bond -- and once a year were preached in rhyme as 'Christmas Tales for All Ages,' much loved and eagerly awaited by the congregation -- were always designed to help his listeners use Biblical perspectives to wrestle with contemporary issues and problems.²¹

Reverend Doctor Read understood the conversion issue and the impact it had on all phases of life. He also understood that the wider church did not always understand the dynamics as seen by the local church.

The idea, beloved of ecclesiastics, that things remain fundamentally the same is a delusion. 'The pressures created by the technological revolution - living in the mass; constant bombardment of ideas, news, entertainment; secular apocalypticism; belief in, and fear of, the scientist-have resulted in a confusion of mind and paralysis of the moral sense on an unprecedented scale.' The preacher must deal with 'bewildered, distracted, uncertain men and women, conditioned to respond to scientific demonstrations, suspicious of obvious propaganda, and unable to see much meaning in our religious propositions.' ... and the preacher must feel with the world.²²

The local clergy or pastor is interested in assuring that those he or she serves acquires a theological anthropology that will allow discipleship and encourage active

²¹ John Filiatreau "Long-Time Pastor of Madison Avenue Church was a Renowned Preacher," Worldwide Faith News, accessed October 20, 2013, <http://archive.wfn.org/2001/02/msg00032.html>.

²² David H. C. Read, "A Review of "The Communication of The Gospel"" Newbigin, accessed September 14, 2013, <http://www.newbigin.net/assets/pdf/52rcg.pdf>.

worship. Theological anthropology differs from the subject of general anthropology in that it is not just the study of human beings and their ancestry, but also their theological reflection of self. This translates into how they believe God interacts with humankind and intervenes in life issues. “The relation of man’s nature to God is not something that is added to an already complete, self-enclosed, isolated nature; it is essential and constitutive for man’s nature, and man cannot be understood apart from this relation.”²³ For the pastor of the church, this is the primary concern of their ministry. Developing disciples is only possible when they realize, “That theological anthropology begins with the divine-human relationship, however, also means that it must begin with the person and work of Jesus Christ.”²⁴ It is their primary responsibility to help and establish an environment that is safe for the newly converted to align himself or herself with the God they are converted to serve. Discipleship in the principles and ways of Christ should be the underlying motive for the entire clergy population.

The act of conversion is a process of agreeing to serve God through Christ in worship and lifestyle. The discipleship of the converted is the birthing of new understandings through intersecting variables and where the intellect accepts the new practices and customs of a newly found belief. Conversion impacts every segment of life for the converted and those they influence. The process of conversion can be described as an overwhelming urging to join the citizenship of the family of faith and to access God for personal growth. Those witnessing the process outside the family of faith understand

²³ Alice H. Eagly, Anne E. Beall, and Robert J. Sternberg, *The Psychology of Gender* (New York, NY: Guildford, 2004), 1.

²⁴ Marc Cortez, *Theological Anthropology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York, NY: T and T Clark International 2010), 5.

its impact in the specific discipline they are dealing with it. The value of conversion to the Christian community is at the heart of our belief. “Since the problem of determining an authentic faith occurs within a society, some of the conditions for maintaining the community in truth will depend upon the implementation of those social conditions that correspond to the effective, moral, and intellectual conversions.”²⁵

For the churches challenged to bring the newly converted into the fold and to allow discipleship that promotes longevity, it is necessary to do more than teach the text. New believers in Christ need to see the text as it is modeled in the lives of their fellow Christians. New Christians are named “babes in Christ” because they are still learning the principles that govern the discipleship. Still learning that the anthropology of humankind is more apt to sin for self-indulgence than to sacrifice for godly character, yet this makes the person no less saved. How to teach the concept that the sin is less a reflection on the character than on the species - is a challenge for all. Social relationships with members in the new church setting are fragile as new believers look to mature Christians for examples. Adding to the dilemma is the need to understand the biblical text in a fashion that is practical and useful for daily living.

The fundamental way of disseminating information throughout the church membership is through Christian education, which unfortunately members who have no formal training in education may teach. Add to this, the doctrine of the church and its implications on the text and the new convert may receive any variation of what it means to be a Christian.

Primarily institutions that educate regarding the history, events and protocol of the Judeo-Christian experience train scholarly Christian leaders. Within the lessons,

²⁵ Stephen Happell, *Conversion and Discipleship*, 136.

unfortunately, are also interwoven messages regarding sexism, classism, and almost every other “ism” possible. Needless to say that whomever is the most influential person during the church leaders educational journey, has great influence in the methodology and psychology of the leader. This carries over into the local churches through its leaders, into the community by way of its congregants and into society by way of its constituents. This has contributed to the overarching decline in main-line church membership and in Christianity as a whole due to global borders becoming closer through technology, new understandings of cultures, ways of life and mixtures of religion and politics. A new social norm and a mixture of international beliefs challenge philosophies and theological values rooted in the organized church. Since Christianity in the United States is modeled differently than Christianity in other parts of the world, there is a misrepresentation of value when the primary focus is on doctrine rather than the biblical text. “John Calvin defined the untranslatable word *pietas*, which for him was the shorthand symbol for his whole understanding and practice of Christian faith and life.”²⁶

To be devoutly reverent to a deity, is a key element for the clergy pastor who is committed to serving the church and its people. To serve the church is to serve the organization established as a foothold for Christian values and principles, individualized by mode or methodology of worship style. To serve the people of the family of faith is to embrace each person who commits themselves to serving Christ and living according to the principles of Christ. Although these two definitions are thought to be interchangeable, there is a clear distinction. Service to an organization is to serve the overarching policies, regulations and objectives of the organizations in regard to the

²⁶ Jean Calvin and Ford Lewis Battles, *The Piety of John Calvin: An Anthology Illustrative of the Spirituality of the Reformer* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978), 13-14.

implementation of service to those within the organization. All too often this includes the politics and undergirding ideologies of whomever is in power at a given time. Human anthropology dictates that the self-serving inclinations to elevate one's self can be overpowering and cause interference for those who are seeking to establish themselves as a force within the organization. In much the same way as corporate ladders enhance careers, so are the careers of clergy seeking elevation in the denominational organizations. This does not mandate corruption, but surely opens doors of opportunities, based simply on our own human nature. All too often, the discipleship of others becomes subjective to personal agendas and needs for career elevation. Additionally, the natural inclination to lean toward personal preferences in our lives can create a foothold for things other than Christian values.

Clergy committed to serving the people of the family of faith are not necessarily bound by organizational politics and social mandates even when apart of a denominational structure. These individuals have aligned their focus with service to people and the principles that are found in the biblical text. Though they possess the same intellectual and spiritual undergirding as their counterparts who are focused on organization patriotism frequently they are not as successful in the organizational structure. This has been a deciding factor for some, as to whether they remain in the denominational church for service. Negative feelings and bad experiences as a result of actions taken by and against these clergy have launched a new platform of television evangelists and non-denominational churches. The independent nature of this platform has given opportunity for varying perceptions regarding Christian discipleship, as well as varying objectives for the Christian walk. The prosperity ministry and those that

purposely focus on Christians that do not attend traditional churches are gaining momentum in an ever-shrinking global society.

In a postmodern context, we are challenged by dwindling numbers of new Christians in traditional denomination churches. There is a viable need to develop a framework that will educate new converts on the biblical text, while teaching principles in a way that enables them to become disciples of Christ as they embrace the text and use its contents as a practical part of their lives. It is impractical, at best, to expect the new Christians without any (or very little church culture or history) to embrace traditions and programs that are not relevant to their lives. Without a place of reference, they will embark upon a journey of conversion and a path of discipleship that is plagued with fog.

Asking new Christians to adhere to traditional dogma and social norms is not only impractical, but also illogical. How can the person without church history embark upon a path that negates the value of the events of their past? Asking new Christians to sever relations of their past for the sake of new relationships that fail to align themselves with the principles they are teaching – is absolutely ridiculous. How can we think that people will come and be a part of an institution that systematically undermines their past lives, demonizes their loved ones and alienates them for the sake of a message that brings salvation and love that is not seen nor modeled by those who profess Christ.

It is only when those without church history realize that church history has no real relevance on discipleship with the exception of having knowledge of biblical principles available for a longer period of time. When new converts without church history understand that availability does not always equate to acceptance of the value, even if it is a ‘family norm.’ To avail oneself to Christ is an individual commitment that defies time,

space and lineage, but rather requires a committed heart for Christ. As they learn that hypocrisy is a common denominator for all people, they will be more apt to extend themselves to reach the goal of discipleship.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

The question being addressed in this doctoral project deals with Christian living in the postmodern world while embracing the biblical text and its values. Generational decreases of traditional church rolls have resulted in the development of atypical theories or theories that have multiple paths to the same God or deity of worship. Therefore, the question becomes, not if God exists, but a debate on the legitimacy of the path to reach God. Thus, theological anthropology is not “an academic exercise,” but it is “an intellectual debate with theology's rivals.” Here lies the challenge: Is the church still relevant in a postmodern context given the common beliefs that there are no absolutes? Is the ancient text of a canonized Bible still relevant in a society that would juxtapose fundamental theological credence and postmodern atypical theory or is Jesus, the Christ the only path to God?

Equipping the postmodern Christian to follow a discipleship path to Christ, in the face of societal apathy toward Christ requires strategic and purposed planning. Designing a framework for Christian Life Planning using biblical principles in a postmodern context is the development of a road map to facilitate theological anthropology.

Theological anthropology is the study of the human experience from a theological point of view.¹ The theological viewpoint addressed in the doctoral project is categorized as the theology of liberation, rather than liberation theology. The difference is that it expands liberation theology because of its undertone that is seen as “... a deliberate misunderstanding that seeks to make a mockery of or to obscure things...”² Life Planning can be conceptualized much like business planning or the development of a road-map whose objective is to set goals, identify resources and map out a series of steps utilizing these resources to reach the objectives or goals. In addition, the plan tries to anticipate the impact on major aspects of the business or life over the time-span of the plan. “Theological anthropology draws attention to God's call for a response in the whole of life.”³

If Jesus Christ is the true manifestation of what it means to be made in the image of God, then we must recognize the importance of at least three factors: (1) the fundamental significance of Jesus' relationship with the Father and the Spirit clearly displayed throughout his life... ; (2) the emphasis that Jesus placed on interpersonal relationships in his earthly ministry ... and (3) the fact that the result of Jesus' ministry was the constitution of a “new man” comprising human persons brought together in relationship as members of his body⁴

¹ Charles Cameron, “John Calvin: An Anthology Illustrative of the Spirituality of the Reformer,” Theological Studies, TheologicalStudies.org accessed April 2, 2014, http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/anthropology_cameron.pdf.

² David Jobling and Tina Pippin, *Semeia 59 Ideological Criticism of Biblical Texts: Ideological Criticism of Biblical Texts* (Atlanta, GA: Cambridge University Press, New York, NY, 1992), 129.

³ Charles Cameron, “John Calvin: an Anthology Illustrative of the Spirituality of the Reformer,” Theological Studies, TheologicalStudies.org accessed April 2, 2014, http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/anthropology_cameron.pdf.

⁴ Marc Cortez, *Theological Anthropology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury T and T Clark, 2010), 26.

In a postmodern era it is important what the church thinks about Jesus, and how it interprets the biblical text to the world. Avery Dulles notes that, “We shall focus on the questions whether and how Christ is at work in and through the Church considered as a social system or a structured community.”⁵ He goes onto say,

Christ may be said to reign in the Church insofar as its members are “charismatically” gifted by the Holy Spirit to perform distinct and mutually complementary functions in building up the body of Christ. Seen in this light, the Church as a charismatically structured community has Christ as its Lord.” ... “Alternatively, Christ lordship may be envisaged as occurring through the institutional structures of that Church ...” ... “This answer particularly commends itself insofar as certain structures of the Church are held to be divinely instituted, and to have a promise of grace attached to them through the will of Christ as founder.”⁶

If the church represents Christ to the world as a charismatic entity empowered by the Holy Spirit that abides within its people, then the people and their positional lens also enter the equation of what is needed to bring others into a “Christian” way of life. These viewpoints differ according to the position of the ones using them. In reaching those in the African-American communities, the relevance of traditional European Christian education lessons taught to the African-American membership are debatable. Dr. Charles R. Foster, an ordained United Methodist Theologian states, “ In the process, the rich heritage of the black experience in Christian education is lost. At the same time, the models of Christian education have little to do with the life and experiences of a vast proportion of the black population in these churches.”⁷

⁵ Avery Dulles, *A Church to Believe In: Discipleship and the Dynamics of Freedom* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1982), 20.

⁶ Ibid., 20-21.

⁷ Charles Foster, *Christian Education Journey of Black Americans: Past, Present, Future* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1985), 14.

In this postmodern arena, the lens of an African-American clergy, may offer a different focus. Reverend Dr. L. Eugene Vaughn states that, “Instead of being purely a racial issue, the question is a theological one ... “What Mean These Stones?” The theology strikes the Christian cords of leadership in urban ministry and challenges the church to develop programs and Christian education to help the poor and marginalized in every sector of community, as well as the racially oppressed.”⁸ Irrespective of which lens you may identify with, what unites both theologians is their understanding of what needs to be done and by whom. “The theological function of the question is a challenge to Christian leadership to devise practical and organizational solutions.” “Christian leadership must ... construct some educational paradigms for teaching transformational leadership within an urban context for the practice of ministry.”⁹

Christian educators who are black must raise at least two questions in attempting to develop an educational design to complement the current movement of black theology: (1) Why have Christian education in the black church at all? and (2) What are its guidelines?” ... “... the black agenda must begin with the black people, and black people must initiate the black agenda. Liberation is not something that can be done *for* a people.”¹⁰

If the organization of the church is seen as “divinely instituted and have the promise of grace attached to it” then the existence of ‘the church’ takes on more importance than the actions ‘within the church.’¹¹ Lee Camp provides a parable that examines this state of being:

⁸ L. Eugene Vaughn “What Mean These Stones? The Educational Development of Christian Paradigms for Teaching Transformational Leadership Within An Urban Context” (DMin diss., United Theological Seminary, 2006), 2.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Charles Foster, *Christian Education Journey of Black Americans: Past, Present, Future*, 15.

¹¹ Avery Dulles, *A Church to Believe In: Discipleship and the Dynamics of Freedom*, 20.

Imagine a remote hamlet, removed from the rest of the world, in which all the inhabitants were afflicted with a strange eye disease. Suppose that this genetically inherited disease manifested itself with only one symptom - a strange cataract which did not blur the victim's vision. Instead, the cataract simply cast a rose-colored tint to the afflicted's vision. In such a scenario, it's quite likely that all the inhabitants of that small, provincial village would simply assume that the world is rose-tinted. So strong, in fact, would be this presupposition - that the world is rose-colored - that the inhabitants of that little hamlet would likely never even discuss it, and certainly never question it! And anyone who might question such an empirical assumption would certainly be considered a bit strange - if not simply irrational. What more do you need - you can see it with your own eyes! " But just what if - what if the Christian church looks at the world with some long inherited presuppositions, assumptions so long held that for anyone to question them leaves us looking for a way to get out of the conversation? What if what has so long been presumed to be "common sense" and "reality" and "truth" is neither true nor real?¹²

As a result of decades of declining church memberships, new ideologies and postmodern shrinkage of geographic barriers, "... traditional Christian understandings of human nature, its origin, limits, and possibilities, seen increasingly under threat due both to societal challenges facing humanity today and development in the natural sciences."¹³ Holding onto beliefs takes strong conviction at any time, but holding onto a faith in a single God with a single path of entry takes divine intervention within a postmodern context. In doing so, it means that the Christian must "... adopt a specifically theological starting-point in ... study of the human experience is to run counter to the prevalent trend of our time."¹⁴ This is an undergirding principle in the biblical text as stated in 1 John 2:19-20, "They went out from us, but they did not really

¹² Lee Camp, *Mere Discipleship: Radical Christianity in a Rebellious World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2003), 20.

¹³ "Christian Perspectives on Theological Anthropology," (Research paper presented at the World Council of Churches, Geneva), accessed April 2, 2014 <http://www.oikoumene.org/en>.

¹⁴ Charles Cameron, "John Calvin: An Anthology Illustrative of the Spirituality of the Reformer," Theological Studies, accessed April 2, 2014, [TheologicalStudies.org, http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/anthropology_cameron.pdf](http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/anthropology_cameron.pdf).

belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us. 20 But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth.”

As Christians in a postmodern era, we must be true to our faith, while diligently being on guard against the influence of the society in which we must live. “The goal is to construct a theological anthropology rather than launching an attack on contemporary society.”¹⁵

Hendrikus Berkhof says man is “... made to encounter God, to respond to his word.”¹⁶ John Calvin says that “... no man can survey himself without forthwith turning his thoughts toward the God in whom he lives and moves...”¹⁷ He further goes on to say that “...man never attains to a true self-knowledge until he has previously contemplated the face of God. ...”¹⁸ Finally, St. Augustine says: “Thus in the Gospel He speaketh through the flesh; and this sounded outwardly in the ears of men; that it might be believed and sought inwardly, and found in the eternal Verity;...”¹⁹ So it would seem that individual transformation is necessary to adopt theological anthropology, for it is the individual in our society that must stand on their convictions, faith and boldly speak truth to power in the society, within the society, we call the church.

¹⁵ Charles Cameron, “Introduction to Luke,” Theological Studies, accessed April 2, 2014 http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/anthropology_cameron.pdf.

¹⁶ William Eerdsman, *Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 181.

¹⁷ “The Institutes of Christian Religion,” Christian Classics Eteral Library, accessed May 14, 2013, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/Institutes.html>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ *Confessions, X, VIII* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1999), 270, accessed May 14, 2013, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/Augustine/Confess.html>.

Theology, or the study of God, addresses the thoughts, emotions and position of the person seeking answers. Our belief in God is one of the most personal aspects of our lives and is as diverse as the cultures of the individual seeking. For the purpose of this doctoral project, the theology addressed is black theology. Black theology is born out of dissatisfaction of African-Americans to reflect upon their understanding of God, even through liberation theology.

A similarity of symptoms is not always a clear indication of what is needed to cure an affliction. "... liberation theology's contribution involves an integration of theology and lived faith, contemplation ..."²⁰ Black theology is a by-product of liberation theology, but is different as expressed by Cornel West, a leading black theologian who states, For oppressed colored peoples, the central problem is not only repressive capitalist regimes, but also oppressive European civilizing attitudes. And even Marxists who reject oppressive capitalist regimes often display oppressive European civilizing attitudes toward colored peoples. In this sense, such Marxists, ... remain captives of the worst of European culture.²¹

Many believe that liberation theology is sufficient to cover black theology because it touches on subjects that overlap. Poverty is the primary enemy in liberation theology. African-Americans face poverty in the United States due to complex issues of racism that feed injustice and impoverishment. Where liberation theology stops, the theology of liberation continues its mission to seek equality from the fundamental factor of racism, which will then feed economic advancement for the African-

²⁰ Erwin Fahlbusch, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* (Leiden, Netherlands: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 264.

²¹ David Jobling and Tina Pippin, *Semeia 59 Ideological Criticism of Biblical Texts*, 129 - 30.

American Christian. There is no question regarding the similarities of liberation theology and the theology of liberation. In liberation theology “The intent to transform the mobilizing power of that piety to goals of transformation without radically altering the very context to the religious consciousness....”²² is sufficient for those that can excel given this equation. Alternatively, the African-American finds it necessary to alter the fundamental barrier to advancement: the consciousness of the oppressor. Black theologian Cornel West advocates the use of dialectic methodology for addressing African-American theology. “Dialectic methodology is a complex procedure useful for grasping, comprehending, interpreting, explaining, or predicting phenomena”²³ A distinguishing attribute of African-American theology is how we deal with theodicy many, “... holds that empirical evidence is never a reliable basis of a biblical truth; the problem of theodicy is never solved in a theoretical manner, only defeated by one's faith in Jesus Christ.”²⁴ Much like the prophet Habakkuk in 2:2-3, his faith in the face of devastation is ingrained in theology.

The aftermath of slavery in the United States, plus more than 200 years of oppression, has taught the African-American Christian how to believe in the face of devastation. Another distinguishing factor to be considered when juxtaposing liberation theology and the theology of liberation is that unlike Christians in Latin America, the African-American Christian is one who has a land in name only, thus it is more than class or economics that separate us from the majority community of the

²² James Goff and Margaret Goff, trans., *Hablemos de nueva evangelización*, (Buenos Aires: Cristianismo y Sociedad, 1976), 37-38.

²³ Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity*, 159.

²⁴ James H. Cone, “God of the Oppressed,” (Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 1997), 187-194.

United States. In essence, “The Negro is only an American, and nothing else. He has no values and culture to guard and protect.”²⁵ For this reason alone, our liberation lies in the transformation of our oppressors’ consciousness.

In order for the African-American Christian to be heard above the noise of marginalization in the United States, it has always been necessary to speak truth to power – or to point out the obvious that others wish to ignore. Pointing out the obvious is not without its ramifications. As an African-American living in a society that has normalized discrimination as a reality the reprisals have ranged from fatal to nominal and all that fall in between. During slavery, the very thought of a slave trying to enlighten those who held life or death in their hands, could result in a fate worse than death. Over time the severity of the retaliation has minimized, but not without substantial cost.

For the African-American Christian, it is their interpretation of the gospel that enabled the ability to speak truth to power – even in the face of reprisals. The words of Cornel West speak loudly:

The basic contribution of prophetic Christianity, ... is that every individual regardless of class, country, caste, race, or sex should have the opportunity to fulfill his or her potentialities ... This first and fundamental norm is the core of the prophetic Christian gospel. A transcendent God before whom all persons are equal thus endows the well-being and ultimate salvation of each with equal value and significance. I shall call this radical egalitarian idea *the Christian principal of the self-realization of individuality within the community*. This is often interpreted as simply the salvation of the individual souls in heaven, an other-worldly community. But such a truncated understanding of the core of the Christian gospel accents its other-worldly dimension at the expense of its this-worldly possibilities. The fuller prophetic Christian tradition must thus insist

²⁵ Nathan Glazer, *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City* (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1963), 53.

upon both this-worldly liberation and otherworldly salvation as the proper loci of Christianity.²⁶

Although looking through the lens of African-American Christians is the focus for this doctoral project, the need to speak truth to power is in no way unique only to the African-American or to American society in general. There are definite similarities between the needs and theology of Martin Luther King Jr. and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. It is made clear that,

... for Bonhoeffer and King, their intellectual resources were to be used in service to the church and as tools to alleviate human suffering. He writes, "Bonhoeffer and King demonstrated for us that one could make a lasting contribution to humanity with a short life dedicated to a worthy cause. ... Bonhoeffer approached this vision and commitment to service as a Lutheran who was deeply influenced by Martin Luther and Karl Barth. Conversely, King believed that the church has a moral obligation to resist collective evil. The function of government for King is to sustain and advance human dignity. When the government or society in general is involved in injustices, it is the responsibility of the church to use nonviolent means to create more just and humane conditions."²⁷

Speaking truth to power is as old as the scriptures themselves. Jesus, the Christ spoke truth to power when he taught in the temple and healed 'Abraham's daughter' in Luke 13:11-17. Challenging the social stigmas and politics of the day, Jesus, the Christ healed on the Sabbath and enraged those who preferred to ignore the obvious infirmity of their own people. The result was empowerment to the people who responded with praise to God. It is this same response, which enables African-American Christians to praise as well. Our journey has been long fought and with much sacrifice; yet we

²⁶ Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity*, 108.

²⁷ Johnny B. Hill, "Bonhoeffer and King: Speaking Truth to Power," *Journal of The Society of Christian Ethics* 30, no. 1 (2010): 211-13, accessed May 15, 2013, <http://www.ebscohost.com/academic/atla-religion-database-with-atlaserials>.

continue to speak loudly the obvious, which others would ignore for the sake of their own agendas.

The church has realized the value of education for a long time. Just as education in the secular society teaches lessons that adhere to social moral character, the church must also teach its lessons in order that its members remain faithful to their beliefs.

... Christianity tells me ... how I may attain the promise, namely, by faith. But what is faith? ... The faith by which the promise is attained is represented by Christianity as a power wrought by the Almighty in an immortal spirit inhabiting an house of clay, to see through that veil into the world of spirits, into things invisible and eternal; a power to discern those things which with eyes of flesh and blood no man hath seen or can see, either by reason of their nature, which ... is ... not perceivable by these gross senses, or by reason of their distance, as being yet afar off in the bosom of eternity.²⁸

The values of the church, its liturgy, doctrine and moral code are all contained within its members and distributed to others through their relationships.

... three ways in which he a seek to share his faith with others: he may attempt to express his faith in words which have meaning for someone else; he may invite others to participate with him in services, in silences, in ceremonies and sacraments which clarify or dramatize his faith; and he may express his faith in his everyday living by giving a concrete example of what it does for men.²⁹

As in secular society, churches have a healthy dose of competition and are concerned with their counterparts in various other doctrines. Each doctrine has its own set of unique principles, propositions and biblical truths they elevate as primary in their ‘following of Christ.’ As human participants in heavenly matters, our reaction is to influence those in our midst to think and interpret the biblical text as we do. St.

²⁸ Albert C. Outler, *John Wesley* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1963), 189.

²⁹ Mary Alice Jones, *Guiding Children in Christian Growth* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, Association by Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950), 15.

Augustine provides a question that examines the doctrinal differences, their validity and influence on the church member.

Thus the truth of a proposition is inherent in itself, but the truth of a consequent depends on the opinion or agreement of the disputant. ... In this way it is one thing to know the rules of valid inference, another thing to know the truth of propositions. Thus the definition and division of the false may be very true, but the false itself cannot be true in any way. ...“There are other similar principles which may be employed either in false or in true causes, but which are themselves true in so far as they cause things to be known or to be believed, or move men's minds either to seek or to avoid something. And these are rather discovered than instituted.”³⁰

Theological anthropology seeks to construct a study of the human experience with a theological viewpoint; so there is no better way to manage the foreseen experiences of human behavior than by creating a living plan for development. “Dialectic methodology is a complex procedure useful for grasping, comprehending, interpreting, explaining, or predicting phenomena.”³¹ This methodology is the force behind the Christian Life Plan Framework.

In an era of postmodern dialogue, an accessible means of planning is to take knowledge that has been accepted and merge that knowledge with faith that has been proclaimed. Transformation of member mindsets to embrace the church and the biblical text, in order to reflect a greater application of the text for their lives, requires learning to extract the knowledge and facilitate their life of the developer. “To learn is to change, as in changing one’s interpretation of an experience, or learning new or

³⁰ Saint Augustine, trans., *Saint Augustine on Christian Doctrine* (New York, NY: The Liberal Arts Press, 1958), 61-71.

³¹ Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity*, 195.

different behavior, or learning to feel differently about something.”³² Interpretation and application of the biblical text is key to this process, but prior to teaching, the church must be clear in its corporate views about Christ.

The theology of the church as a whole is taught to its members and then becomes intricately engrained in the culture of the membership. Dr. J. Derrick Johnson, Bishop in the United Holy Church in America notes that: “Because interpretation is relative in nature, there must be a critique of the church’s interpretation concerning God and the things of God. To do otherwise would mean that the church’s interpretation is arbitrary and unquestioned.”³³ Church members today seek clarity and commitment on a higher level, primarily because they are more educated; therefore, demand a higher theological ethos than ever before. The presiding officer of the church, the pastor, has the greatest influence and sets the tone for worship, education and outreach for the congregation. No longer are clergy given immediate validation, but are examined for their theological astuteness as well as their moral character.

Theological doctrine must adhere to some of the practical needs of baseline education, even for the church. “More important than any theory of inspiration is our faithfulness in teaching the Bible. No other source provides an adequate authority or basis for Christian education. Christian education depends upon “leading out” of Scripture what the Bible writers intended to say.”³⁴ What the church believes about

³² Christine E. Blair, *The Art of Teaching the Bible: A Practical Guide for Adults* (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 2001), 25.

³³ J. Derrick Johnson, *Pastoring With A Picture Behind You* (Chicago, IL: Johnson Publishing, 2014), 46.

³⁴ John H. Aukerman, *Discipleship That Transforms: An Introduction to Christian Education from a Wesleyan Holiness Perspective* (Anderson, IL: Warner Press, 2011), 2-3.

Jesus is the foundation for conversion, discipleship and the authority for the church to exist. Bonhoeffer made this clear in his reference to the biblical text in Mark 2:14: “This encounter gives witness to Jesus’ unconditional, immediate, and inexplicable authority. Nothing precedes it, and nothing follows except the obedience of the called. Because Jesus is the Christ, he has authority to call and to demand obedience to his word. Jesus calls to discipleship, not as a teacher and a role model, but as the Christ, the Son of God.”³⁵

In the same way Jesus acted as the role model, the pastor models the Christian lifestyle and beliefs for the members. The influence of the pastor or leader of the church cannot be minimized and impacts all that attend. From the infant to the senior member, they digest the theology of the church in which they attend. At a level of quality approved by consensus, it is essential for those most susceptible to this influence to be taught. In order to retain young people as apart of the church it has been long recognized that influencing their lives at the earliest age yields the greatest results.

This growing child with all his possibilities and all his limitations must be squarely in the midst of all adult planning if Christian nurture is to be influential in his life. No program, no course of study, no methods, no services may be pronounced good except in relation to the child for whom intended. ... If they help that child to grow in understanding, in knowledge, in ability to cooperate with his fellow men, in responsiveness to the love and wisdom of God – if they help the child to be, at each stage of his growth, what God intended for him to be, and to move on from that stage of growth to the next – then they are good.³⁶

Designing a framework for 'Life Planning' using biblical principles in a postmodern context is a development of a road map to facilitate theological

³⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship* (New York, NY: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 57.

³⁶ Mary Alice Jones, *Guiding Children in Christian Growth* (New York, NY: Published for the Co-operative Publishing Association by Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950), 14.

anthropology. In order for the framework to be adequate it must be flexible enough to be utilized by various doctrines of Christian faith without diminishing its theological soundness. The primary function of the Christian Life Plan Framework is to construct a model to be used within and outside of the church walls as first a Discipleship tool then ultimately as an evangelistic conversion tool.

The process of making disciples is apart of Jesus' Great Commission and has been a goal of the church since it's beginning. In order to create disciples for Christ it is first necessary to grow the applicable faith of the individual believer. In a postmodern environment, this literally requires a commitment to follow Christ and to utilize the biblical principles for the planning of their lives. It impacts not only the individual developing the plans, but can reach into the next four generations of those who develop the plan. Long and short-term goals and objectives are quantified and decided upon, based on the principles and standards of the individual Christian.

The process and or finished product may enable the Christian developer to share their faith with others outside of the church family, thereby acting as an evangelistic tool. The Bible tells us explicitly that the word of God will not return void to itself, but will do that which God has intended in those it touches (Isaiah 55:11). Though the process is postmodern, the undergirding principles and objectives are as old as the Bible itself. Its effectiveness is directly related to the faith lessons, actions and theologies of the church family, now and in the past.

In conclusion, the fundamental purpose for the project is not just the development of individual plans that facilitate managing life expected experiences, identification of personal goals and objectives, and substantiating the faith proclaimed

by the person developing the plan; but is the design of a system (a process, if you would) for doing so by use of the church. The individual plan is a by-product in that it is derived from the lessons of faith enacted by the church ancestors and modern-day theologians.

Christian Life Plan processing is a mechanism to increase the faith of the developer by mandating that they draw upon the principles they have learned. The wisdom of the text is the primary guide to decisions for the developer. Historically, theologians and church elders have sought various ways to convert, disciple and activate the faith of its members – and this process is just another step toward the same goal.

For the African-American Church community, it is intended as a vehicle to break the chains of racism to free people so that he or she “...have the opportunity to fulfill his or her potentialities.”³⁷ By enabling the developer to utilize a process that guides their creation of life goals and objectives for all aspects of their existence, it also forces them to overcome the imbalances of life as a marginalized member of this postmodern society. As they learn to depend on the wisdom of the ages and the authority given by their divine Father, they let go of self-inflicted barriers born out of their feelings of inadequacy and nurtured by a society that has consistently deemed them less important.

As faith rises, so does self-esteem and they begin to embrace the authority and power as children of God, graphed into righteousness, in spite of their social position. Enlightenment and exposure have ignited faith for the African-American community

³⁷ Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity*, 108.

over the decades of dejection and remains the most viable tool for returning to the powers that have proven effective in the face of oppression.

The realizations of the importance of resolving the state of being imbalanced is not unique to the marginalized community, but has been recognized by the social norm for generations. Its urgency in the African-American community is due to the continuous factors that encourage discrimination against the community and that appear to be present on all sides and all aspects of life.

The human being is equipped with delicate mechanisms to meet the imbalancing tensions. The process is “homeostasis”. In the multitude of ongoing situations many of the resulting imbalances are restored by satisfactory adjustment and in a variety of ways. But many are not adjusted. These may be repressed or ignored or escaped from. As a consequence, feelings of uncertainty, instability, or some other deep-lying sense of deficiency may develop. When this happens, we have an inferiority complex.³⁸

There is no better way to reverse an inferiority complex than to build the self-esteem within the individual. Though they are not protected from the negative actions of society against them, they are better equipped to negate these forces by using an authority that has proven divine. As far back as slavery, the African-American people have been forced to overcome their social position by use of divine mentality. Major contributions to society were made in spite of circumstance of an oppressed people – proving this to be true.

By using the only true power, the biblical text, it is possible for even oppressed people to be educated, inspired, empowered and validated as equal in the eyes of a good God. The power of the biblical text is as prevalent as it was when written, and even

³⁸ Harold Rugg, *Foundations for American Education* (New York, NY: World Book Company, 1947), 200-201.

today can prove to be an invaluable tool to reach the heart of humankind. When the spirit of the person is ignited with the power of the biblical text, miracles still occur.

What a person believes about God and how God interacts and intervenes in their personal situations is instrumental to growing their faith and enabling them to utilize the power of the biblical text. Creating a theological anthropology is to create a personal credo of belief regarding the engagement of God, the Christ and the Holy Spirit in the life's blood of a person's existence. What better way to discover their theological anthropology than by using their faith to map out their future?

Increased faith and commitment in the face of postmodern atypical theology is the greatest single phenomena necessary for discipleship and conversion of a social population that is growing increasingly anti-God. Social agendas, challenges of environmental and human issues are significant; but cannot be fought at the price of loosing the power that Jesus, the Christ died to give us. The Great Commission is the fundamental rationale for speaking truth to power to a world that would deem the biblical text irrelevant. Irrespective of the century engaged, I propose that this is a significant part of what God intended when the Christ gave the command to go throughout the world, teaching the principles and making disciplines of new followers.

CHAPTER FIVE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Development of theological anthropology creates a viewpoint of life and its characteristics as seen through a person's understanding of God, and how God interacts and has interacted in their lives and circumstances. Such a viewpoint is essential to the development of a Christian ethos, which reflects biblical principles and adjusts its agenda to be a mirror of God's desire for their life.

As mainline Christian churches struggle to keep their doors open, with aging congregants, they are challenged by a society with a postmodern mindset that embraces an individualistic and independent agenda. The western culture that had professed high percentages of Christian believers is gone and has been replaced with a culture, which places enlightenment over salvation. Caught in a paradigm of sensationalism, the gap between traditional Judeo-Christian believers and non-believers has widened. Once thriving institutions of religion, are now hollow representations of their past, while organizations that merely identify with the concept of church thrive using a 'do it your way' mentality. Religious discipline is exchanged for 'common courtesy' in an era where righteousness is equated with being a nice person. The mere fact that conversion still occurs in a postmodern era tells us that God is still calling the creation.

So the development of a Christian ethos, or discipleship, remains the issue. In a postmodern era people see themselves as individuals, collectively living life. Lives are free of governing forces except those that are perceived through their physical senses or imagination. In essence their lives are a direct reflection of how they perceive existence. If they do not perceive a divine interaction it cannot be reflected in how they structure, plan and interpret their life and its meaning. It is the inference of this project that this postmodern mentality is a major deciding factor in whether a person remains in the Christian church; therefore, it is key to changing the plight of our current mainline Christian churches.

Jesus, the Christ gave the 'double' Commission long ago and each aspect of the command is of equal importance. The essence of obtaining true Christian living will not allow us to compartmentalize, but requires both parts to equate a whole in Christ.

The Great Commission of Jesus, as it is now known, contains not one but two commands. ... The Double Commission is significant. The proclamation of the good news of Jesus is utterly essential. The facts about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and the truths he declared must be let loose in the minds and hearts of all people. Always and everywhere humanity needs the illumination only Jesus can give. ... Making disciples is of equal importance. People must be brought into an abiding relationship with Jesus. Discipleship is a growing experience.¹

Becoming a disciple of Christ means to adhere to the ways of Christ, thus the question: can the principles of the canonized Bible be sustained in this postmodern society? In order to meet the needs of the postmodern generation, it is necessary for the church to be strategic in its operations.

¹ Alan Walker, *Making Disciples* (Lake Junaluska, NC: World Evangelism, 1980), 1.

As the numbers of unbelievers continue to increase and mix with those who have adjusted the biblical instruction to meet current agendas, the traditional Judeo-Christian mainline church must also realign. Biblical truths are not negotiable, but the tools of teaching can make a difference in the comprehension of the lesson. Hanging onto antiquated methods for the sake of tradition, feeds the myth that religion is outdated, so the church must learn to expand and enhance its ways of conducting business in order to survive. There must be a return to the fundamental responsibility of providing a nurturing environment to increase or sustain the faith, however it is no longer advantageous to do so only to the select few who have a church history. Brueggemann notes that, “Discipleship is no easy church program. It is a summons away from our characteristic safety nets of social support.”²

Lack of teaching biblical truths has created a spiritual void in the midst of newly formed churches. Programs, generalizations, and speeches with no theological substance have captured the attention of those who want to belong, as long as it is convenient. “Today, we live in a society where many are increasingly comfortable with using the description “post-denominational” to depict the American religious scene.”³ Buildings are filled with people who belong to a social movement that follows the trends and dictates subjectivity. The new member is neither expected nor encouraged to change, but rather accepted in a congenial fashion. What of salvation? If conversion is the adoption of Christian faith and discipleship is to be prescribed to a fundamental set of objectives, how can it be subjective?

² Walter Brueggemann, *The Word That Redescribes the World: The Bible and Discipleship*, (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2006), 95.

³ Mark Toulou, *Joined in Discipleship: The Shaping of Contemporary Disciples Identity* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1997), 246.

Throughout centuries, the processes of conversion and discipleship have been validated in the behavioral, theological, and educational sciences. Education and the behavior sciences seek to understand what happens with these events, so they may better manage the results that impact their discipline. Understanding the intricate make-up of a conversion and or changes in behavior allows development of strategies that align with their desired end.

Each has acknowledged the life-changing attributes of conversion without question. The secular educational community has seen conversion and subsequent discipleship as a specific pedagogy transformative process where biblical principles are taught. Religious education looks at the pedagogical aspect through its own lens as noted by Joseph Marino, "... discipleship, also when viewed from a pedagogical point of view, must be understood in the light of the full development of the person. To follow Jesus, to be his disciples, does not mean a precarious subordination, a reductive humiliation of one's personality." The church validates its text to the anthropology community by pointing to basic historical biblical facts that align timelines with significant activities in cultural history.

The sciences of psychology and sociology have evaluated the process of conversion coupled with discipleship in efforts to understand its internal stimuli that promote various external behaviors.

... the assumption that people convert primarily because they are attracted to particular new doctrines, and they replace it by the thesis that 'conversion is seldom about seeking or embracing an ideology; it is about bringing one's religious behavior into alignment with that of one's friends and family members.'⁴

⁴ Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006), 115-17.

Anthropology, which is the science of people and their ancestry in relation to their physical, environmental, social and cultural characteristics seeks to rationalize the process of conversion and discipleship, both in secular and theological anthropology. “Alternatively, as in the modern West, secular idioms may provide a non-spiritual alternative to the ideals of religious transcendence, or the give and take of self interested exchange may narrow moral vision and erode popular interest in projects of ethical transcendence.”⁵

... Scripture, which shows us the relationship between man and his Creator, we observe the dynamics of this modern struggle. The issue at stake in this struggle is ultimately not the knowledge concerning man as fellow-man but also the knowledge concerning *self*. In the secularization of transcendence we discover the truth of Calvin’s statement, “On the other hand it is manifest that man will never obtain a perfect knowledge concerning himself, *unless* he has first beheld God’s countenance and then descends from his look to the contemplation of self.”⁶

Philosophy seeks to look behind the divine process to discover the human ethics interacting with our social norms. On the other hand it is acknowledged that man will never obtain a perfect knowledge concerning himself, unless he has first “... dealt with whatever makes them closed.”⁷ “This is more likely to happen if we realize two things: they can give so much only because they are open to receive, and they have become open because they have acknowledged and dealt with whatever makes them closed.”⁸

⁵ Robert Hefner, *Conversion to Christianity: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transformation* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 34-35.

⁶ G. C. Berkouwer, *General Revelation Studies in Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1968), 228.

⁷ Donald Evans, *Spirituality and Human Nature* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), 317.

⁸ Ibid.

The church understands the necessity of conversion for salvific reasons. The process of conversion and subsequent discipleship involves every aspect of the life of the converted and involves making intimate decisions as a new Christian. Whether new to the church or a long time member who finally is divinely inspired to repent and return to the will of God, conversion or re-commitment is a life-changing event. In the Christian church, the process of conversion is the lynchpin to all aspects of its belief system. When growing in discipleship, these new Christians find their new identity “... coming to know oneself as a Christian, having assimilated the values, beliefs, and lifestyle of one who profess to be a follower of Jesus Christ,”⁹, regardless of denominational doctrine.

Passive conversion (*conversio passiva*) refers to the habit or disposition, implanted by God, to repent and believe in Christ as Savior. Active conversion (*conversio activa*) is the actual turning of the sinner in repentance and faith in Christ. Passive conversion is also termed “regeneration” because it involves the renewal of the sinner’s will. Active conversion, or the actual turning of the sinner to Christ, is often termed simply “conversion” without any additional qualifications.¹⁰

Supporting the believer, after conversion has taken place, is the responsibility of the local church.

Teaching biblical principles in the local church is both scripturally founded and denominationally focused. Clergy or the existing Christian education officers are generally responsible to teach new members classes, Bible study and seasonal classes such as Vacation Bible School. It is the responsibility of the church to teach the biblical text in a manner that is positive and comprehensive as such by new Christians.

⁹ Sondra Higgins Matthaei, *Making Disciples: Faith Formation in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 22.

¹⁰ William Greenough Thayer Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Nabu Press, 2003), 953.

According to Dr. David F. Watson of United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio

“ ... there are some options for thinking through positive descriptions of the nature and function of scripture, but the denominations themselves don’t seem to have offered many clear proposals about what scripture is, what it does, or how we should approach it.”¹¹

Unfortunately, many Christian educators are chosen because of availability rather than their expertise. Add to this fact that their personal understanding stems from whatever they have been taught may create any variation from what is intended. Many times materials or curriculums are purchased from denominational printing offices, which helps to manage the flow of information, but advocates instruction in a traditional manner. So the newly converted into the family of faith receives their indoctrination through materials and instruction in a way that may be inadequate to secure a concrete understanding.

This system of indoctrination has gone on for decades, and in previous years was satisfactory; but today it has proven insufficient to meet the needs of those entering the faith. In past years, most came to the church with some knowledge about the scriptures or church culture, but today with second and third generation of non-believers this is no longer the case. It is human nature to assume a certain level of limited knowledge, and with these assumptions comes gaps of instruction. In most Christian churches it is assumed that most people know the birth and resurrection story of Christ, but modern day secular celebrations of once spiritual holidays has taken away that guarantee. Although some of the holidays celebrated as Christian came from secular festivals of biblical times,

¹¹ David F. Watson, “I Know What You Don’t Believe About the #Bible.... What DO you Believe?,” United Theological Seminary, August 15, 2014, accessed October 3, 2014, <http://davidfwatson.me/2014/08/15/i-know-what-you-dont-believe-about-the-bible-what-do-you-believe/>.

they have traditionally been seen as holy. The commercialization of these holidays has provided a new level of misinformation and has all but removed any religious attachment.

Acceptance of Christ comes as an infilling of God's spirit; but it remains true that it is the responsibility of the church to provide a safe passage for new converts to embrace and elevate their faith into discipleship. As unbelievers find Christ and open their hearts to faith, stumbling blocks that diminish their ability to remain in the church must be minimized. Non-believers converted into the church today face not only a new path to righteousness, but they also encountered barriers to entry.

Appearing to be unconsciously done, new converts are expected to understand and embrace mature Christian doctrine without prior experience. Invited and surrounded by smiling faces promising love, they often are met with judgment and even ridiculed because of their lack of understanding. This is complicated by an undermining environment that holds most of what they enjoyed in life, as horrific. In addition, indirect references to ungodly behavior patterns and demonized characteristics became prohibitive to most who entered the family of faith as an adult, so historically most of the adult converted Christians leave the church within the first year. All this leaves the new Christian in the church asking, "...can you tell us how to survive the church that is actually (here) there?"¹²

Absent from their learning experience the new Christian still sees themselves in the same context, just adding Christ to their schedule. In order to truly meet Christ in a relationship that is interactive, the convert must be able to see themselves as Christians.

¹² Darlene Fozard Weaver, *Discipleship and the City* (Villanova, PA: The Villanova University Press, 2007), 1.

Not as individuals in a church, but as believers in a God who is interwoven into their practical lives and plans. New converts and existing members of the church that have not yet actually been converted face the same plight: belonging to a church, without the benefit of belonging to Christ. Without discipleship, they are Christians in name only. For those who have not yet obtained discipleship, they may lose many of the benefits of Christianity. *Problems of Discipleship* by H. Bisseker, “one of the common problems of the Christian disciple is that presented by fluctuation in religious happiness. “How often are souls, warmed by the sacred influences on Sunday, by its holy friendships, its inspiring worship, its fellowship in prayer – have been chilled at the return of Monday with its different atmosphere and less sympathetic companionships!” The perception of the new Christian becomes their reality as they live and plan their lives through a Christian lens. The way they behave, understand, plan and treat others all correlates with how they see themselves.

As a second generation African-American adult convert, my struggles enlighten me regarding the struggles of trying to acclimate into a culture that devalues your lifestyle and its characteristics. Imagine the bewilderment that was experienced when told that your ability to be self-sufficient was a negative trait, despite the fact, that self-sufficiency was taught as the ultimate goal for your entire life. Consider being witness to internal jokes about secular behavior they feel is deplorable and you remember those you loved and respected participating in similar behavior. Add to the confusion, the reality of the double standard you encounter when someone in the church hurts you without any responsibility for his or her actions. Then you are expected to forgive for their sake - what? How about common decency, where is the moral obligation to apologize when

wrong? It is no wonder, the lack of self-esteem is ramped among those converted in adulthood. They have not yet constructed a theological anthropology, which is the foundation for their new life. It is not proposed that the local church stop teaching Christian education or that they hire only professionals to do so, but rather that options for increased comprehension be taken when available. Biblical scholars are equally responsible as clergy for they are the professors who transfer knowledge to the clergy of our local churches.

In otherwise vigorous academic revival of practical theology of the past few decades, little attention has been given to pedagogy. Teaching largely remains secondary to scholarship ... suggests that practical theologians, who among theological educators stand the closest to the juncture between church and academy and thus must continually assert the relevance of their teaching in the theological academy, possess (or in order to be effective need to possess) pedagogical wisdom... practical theologians are often especially attuned to the relative inadequacy of the classroom and the need to reach both backward to where people come from and forward to where they are going in order to connect what is taught and learned in school to much broader contexts of learning and formation.¹³

This doctoral project suggests that within the local churches, supplemental tools can be used to aid new converts in development of theological anthropology, which will provide a Christian lens for their lives.

Construction of their anthropology should be purposed and the use of supplemental tools to engage new believers in their process of interweaving the doctrine into their lives must be strategic in nature. Trends, like the shrinkage of membership and attendance in local Bible study must be addressed. It is estimated by Norman Tate that “On the average, something like seventy-five percent of the church members are not to be

¹³ Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra, *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: William. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 171-173.

found in weekly Bible study.”¹⁴ Reversing these trends will allow other barriers to be addressed through teaching moments. Language, jargon, definitions and intentions should be made clear and careful consideration to explain each aspect in its entirety for greater comprehension.

Congregations must be sensitized to the feelings of new converts and realize the hurt, which can be caused by a mere gesture. Each new convert should be treated as though they have no Christian knowledge. Leaders must be willing and able to rationalize traditional ritual and liturgy to increase the knowledge and provide a church background. It is not enough to be hospitable; the church must be inclusive.

For decades the church has treated those new converts who enter its doors as overflow, it must now re-evaluate and consider them as fundamental. No longer is there an abundance of believers and each new convert should be nurtured as if the church survival depends on them. It is foolish for the family of faith to believe people will continue to come when the mistreatment of others paves the path to the doors.

Cable television and Internet communication allow the believer that is mistreated in the church to receive good sermons, Bible study or a musical concert without going to church. If they change channels often enough the new convert can eventually find a doctrine that feeds their agenda, but usually not their soul. For the right price, any person can be told their salvation is secure if they are willing to align themselves with the activities of others. Good deeds, charitable programs, and self-sacrifice do not equate to salvation, however, for those who are looking for a sense of peace, the choices are there.

¹⁴ Norman A. Tate, “The Transforming Effect of Systematic Biblical Education Upon the Local Church” (DMin diss., United Theological Seminary, 2003), 19.

This doctoral project proposes to use as a supplement to Christian education, the use of a life plan to facilitate the initial outline of a persons theological anthropology - intended for members of the local church. Utilizing proven business methodology, a plan is developed that identifies goals and objectives, anticipates the impact of implementation, and allows for re-alignment to fit specific situations using biblical principles. The new convert or existing member of the church has an opportunity to strategize their future actions while understanding what the scriptures say about the subject. There is a teaching dynamic that expands knowledge of scripture and its intended meaning to the original audience, while interpreting what it means today.

An entirely new perception is encouraged as the once secular viewpoint gives way to a theological lens. Life dynamics are exposed to theological interpretation and the person maps out a plan of action using their new faith. Creating a theological anthropology is much like spiritually and psychologically changing the environment in which you live. Each person must realize that Christianity is as much about freedom as it is about righteousness.

Recognizing their bondage to secular trends, social idioms, and spiritual wickedness is secondary to realizing the freedom that is available through Christ. Only liberty can be an antidote to bondage and the liberty of living in a relationship with a loving personal Savior should be exposed. Quickly they will correlate between righteousness and liberty thus beginning to process their anthropology while creating their plan.

As scriptural references and their significance address the issues of life, the person will begin to see their own lives through the eyes of a very real Savior. The

human need to belong and to find love in their lives will manifest into a new level of faith as they witness the love of Christ in their lives. As if through new eyes, the people that surround them through this process will become family in their new reality. The peace in living for a God that is actively working for their best interest will be intellectually and spiritually juxtaposed with a life that had been guided by social whims, cultural trends, and the need for accolades.

Systematically the faith of the individual will evolve into a new level of belief, which they in turn shall influence those around them to see life in a different manner. It is similar to the process of a good sermon. The inspiration of God uses the human personality of people to assist others to understand. Initially, the scene is set and the backdrop given for understanding. Subsequently, the path is outlined and the journey begins. Each point or aspect of a didactic sermon is laid out in intricate detail to allow interaction. Grand efforts are made to correlate the spiritual aspect of the biblical text with current issues addressing those in attendance.

The clergy may use props, slideshows, or any numbers of aids to assure those attending receive clarity of the sections being described. The climax, or celebration if you would, is when all segments come together to celebrate the works of a good God. Upon completion, the Christian not only believes in Christ, but also has interwoven an interactive relationship with their God, then sets forth to embark upon a journey of faith. The results create a generational ripple in the families and friends that are influenced by the person with a new lens. Now the church has a member who takes ownership in what they believe.

In order to be successful, the church and its leaders must be purposed and genuine in their efforts to increase their membership with believers who intend to become life members. Local congregations must understand this is a war, not just a battle. Successful denominational congregations understand the strategy of war within the church and how necessary it is for communication to be consistent. Bishop Millicent Hunter of the Baptist Worship Center in Philadelphia, PA has a bolstering congregation and contributes part of their success to communication. She notes that “If the church has a clear mission / vision and it is communicated to the congregation, it keeps all focused and on the same page,” as explained during the Candidacy Review Session in Dayton, OH on November 4, 2014. Leadership must take the responsibility to assure new Christians and existing ones remain apart of the family of faith and this can only be done through the joint efforts of all who contribute to the existence of the church. Religious scholars, pastors and church leaders of all denominations must participate in the revolution for Christ.

We must be careful to strategize this revolution for Christ so that the results edify Christ, not be perceived as simply a coup for power by the church. They must understand the difference between a revolution and a ‘coup’ for power.

Dialogue with the people is radically necessary to every authentic revolution. This is what makes it a revolution, as distinguished from a military coup. One does not expect dialogue from a coup - only deceit (in order to achieve “legitimacy”) or force (in order to repress). ... Its very legitimacy lies in that dialogue ... It cannot fear the people, their expression, their effective participation in power. It must be accountable to them, they must speak frankly to them of its achievements, its mistakes, its miscalculations and its difficulties.¹⁵

¹⁵ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York, NY: The Continuum International Publishing Group, Inc., 2008), 128.

They cannot sloganize the people, but must enter into dialogue with them, so that the people's empirical knowledge of reality, its nourished by the leaders' critical knowledge, gradually becomes transformed into knowledge of the causes of reality. ... In a dynamic, rather than static, view of revolution, there is no absolute "before" or "after" with the taking of power as the dividing line.¹⁶

In revolution, the people do not feel they are being overpowered nor are they being conquered. In a revolution, people are liberated to go forth and live life to their greatest potential. It is hopeful all families of faith will use this project, but the reality is that the methodologies being used are focused on success in the African-American church. The history of the African-American in the United States has been a series of 'coup(s).' Each battle fought with significant casualties, but nominal achievement. African-Americans in the United States understand oppression and coups and have an innate sense for identifying and opposing them. The use of proven tools for comprehension in African-American communities and churches has been purposely used. One such tool is the use of "Dialectic methodology [which] is a complex procedure useful for grasping, comprehending, interpreting, explaining, or predicting phenomena."¹⁷ This method has been used for decades and is a signature in preaching, teaching, and expounding on the works of others.

This project has been undertaken as only a segment of what must be done to revolutionize a society for Christ. The recognition must come from within the family of faith (first) that indeed we are in spiritual warfare for people in our society. Tactics and efforts less than those needed to win a war will be insufficient to change the plight of our present mainline church institutions. Holding onto an elitist mentality and the continued

¹⁶ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York, NY: The Continuum International Publishing Group, Inc., 2008), 128 -134.

¹⁷ Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity*, 159.

use of oppressive tactics will not work in a social norm that demands enlightenment. This should not be a threat to our institutions of religion if they indeed hold true what they teach.

The biblical text is consistent and has withstood scrutiny for centuries; yet many who profess to be believers are timidly being overshadowed by hollow theory appearing real. In order to reveal and illuminate the truth of the scriptures, we must first believe the authority of our God. The spiritual principles of faith have been captured and used as weapons against the local churches by the sensationalism of those who reach the lost in a vacuum. Their inability to interact with those who follow them has been dismissed as insignificant, in place of superficial assurances of fiscal bliss - yet the church remains silent.

The ministry found in television evangelism cannot be undermined or said that the intentions of the ministry is not genuine or a valid source to receive the biblical text. Many members of churches have found refuge in the television evangelistic programing after be emotionally and or psychologically hurt by the church. If a soul finds refuge in the authority of the text - it is still evangelism. It is the adding on of non-biblical rhetoric that may cause harm. Although there appears to be a clear rivalry between the television ministry and the local church, the same biblical text is taught. Perhaps the rivalry is not so much rivalry of ministries but an attempt by those who have previously been hurt by the church to try and provide another venue for others. There is no clear competition when all parties speak the truth; it is the sensationalism that will reveal the difference. Not the how of methodology; but rather the why will eventually be revealed in either platform.

Great care, consideration and planning must take place in the local church in order to train present members to be sensitive to the needs of new converts. Education of instructors of the gospel, teachers of the classes, and leaders are essential to assure the message of Christ is accurate and clearly perceived by those in attendance. It is the clergy or leadership of the overall church who must be purposeful in establishing a vision and the overarching theological anthropology. In this way they convey the message of Christ and fulfill its mission to make disciples of its people. Now that is ministry.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

The hypothesis for this project was formulated from the ministry focus and the fundamental research conducted. The hypothesis for this project is that when a Christian's perception of life is changed from a postmodern socially acceptable secular mentality to a theologically conscious ethos (leaning toward Discipleship in Christ), the influence of scripture significantly impacts how they view relationships and life decisions. This increases their commitment to Christ therefore increases their probability of Christian discipleship because they develop a personal Theological Anthropology for their lives.

Ministry Model Design

The foundational research is done based on the undergirding biblical recipe prescribed by Christ to transfer power that can heal and sustain a troubled world in Matthew 28:19a "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations ..." Though this command that was issued more than two thousand years ago, it is the contention of this project that it serves as the remedy for today. The biblical text of Habakkuk 2:2-3 spoke to times of disobedience of the people chosen by God and the reassurance of God that his promises remain true and can be seen by writing the vision based on their personal

understanding of God. Luke 13:10 – 17 tells the story of Christ demonstrating the grace required to meet the needs of God's chosen people. This demonstration was done in worship space that revealed the spirit of the God's law rather than its legalistic aspects. In the healing of 'Abraham's daughter' on the Sabbath, Christ provided an example of grace and then enabled a covenant that spiritually 'grafted in' the entire world based upon the individual's faith.

The project finds its base in the recipe given by the Christ for the world and attempts to achieve this command by tapping into the same grace demonstrated by Jesus when he heals the woman in opposition of the agenda of the day. By utilizing the biblical principles, a framework for constructing a Christian Life Plan has been developed that enables discipleship by exposing church members to the biblical text and its undergirding meanings regarding various aspects of their life. Through the influence of the biblical text each person is empowered to develop a Theological Anthropology or a personal moral code in which to live their lives, thus a theologically conscious ethos.

Research Instruments Utilized

The geographical challenge of implementing a project to the entire Fifth Episcopal District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, which comprises fifteen domestic states, 214 local churches and 256 thousand members requires innovative methods in order to facilitate the project. Keeping in mind the factors of cost, time allotment and geographical distance meant that the use of Internet based technology would better serve this particular project. In order to accommodate this, initially a single-page website presence was created and virtual learning and a separate meeting

environments were contracted. Through the web presence, potential participants could get more information about the project as well as submit any questions or request to sign-up through an online “Participation Form” that was electronically submitted by email. Research instruments used to measure effectiveness were a demographic profile, pre/post tests and mechanisms to capture audible dialogue and a structured open-ended follow-up questionnaire.

A demographic profile was developed and required from all who agreed to participate in the project in addition to their initial sign-up forms. Because the contextual environment was geographically challenging, the solicitation of participants was done via Internet and first introduced to those who had the authority to deter the participation. In an Episcopal hierarchical structure, without the consent of the supervising members, it is an uphill battle for implementation of programs or events that impacts the congregants of the church. This fact made it essential that the project be presented to supervising individuals in an adherence to protocol mandates in African Methodism.

Presiding Elders (who supervise assigned pastors in the local church) and the senior pastors (who are assigned, minister to the individual local congregations) received the project information first. The demographic profile was selected because it provides baseline data or “... data that establishes current performance or knowledge prior to the introduction of an intervention or a teaching”¹ It was anticipated that the data would reveal key spiritual and general indicators that differentiate participants and could be used to realize trends when analyzed.

¹ Daniel J. Boudah, *Conducting Educational Research: Guide to Completing a Major Project* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2010). 295.

Pre-tests and post-tests were developed that would identify relational priorities regarding target life segments to be addressed during the project. Each participant was required to complete the pre-test which asked that they rank by priority which relationships had the most influence on targeted life decisions to be addressed in the project. From 1 – 5 these influences were ranked with 1 being the greatest influence over the decision being made and 5 being non-applicable. The purpose of this instrument was to identify any changes in prioritization after completing the project. It was anticipated that the demonstrated adjustment of relationship priorities would show changing perceptions regarding life planning. Participants completed the pre-test in the first of the five sessions after a description of the overarching project and their related questions. Changes of priorities in decision-making would act as indicators of effectiveness of the project.

Discipleship is the transformation of behavior to reflect a theologically informed ethos – to take on the characteristics of Christ by using biblical principles as the primary influence for decisions. When perception changes, relationship influence also changes. Decisions are based on a set of priorities that govern our behavior and lifestyles. In an postmodern environment, atypical theories often reflect decisions with short-term benefits, void of the long-term vision of God. While they may accommodate a current need or desire, without the benefit of divine guidance they generally do not provide a decision that has positive effects on the entire lifetime. Thus, those whose perceptions were once influenced by the trends of society, will show a different influence for their decisions once a Christian ethos becomes a priority in their lives.

Open-ended questionnaires were used in conjunction with audible recordings of four of the five one hour working sessions and a verbatim was documented of three of the five sessions. An additional one-hour session was planned to allow catch-up for anyone having difficulty. The purpose was to provide a structured way to capture dialogue during the sessions in order to measure project effectiveness. The open-ended follow-up questionnaire provided an opportunity for the participants to describe the projects value (or the lack thereof) for their lives within a semi-structured environment. In addition, they doubled as feedback evaluations for the process used in implementation of the project as well. The questionnaire also captured suggestions for improving the development process.

Measurement

Each data tool was utilized for a specific purpose and analyzed for productivity. The initial participant solicitation was a letter sent introducing the program to the supervising church officials. Project description, objectives, length of time and session dates was sent with further direction to access a “Participation Form” online. A website was established to become a venue for questions, signups and program description. Those interested in more information or ready to sign up to participate were able to complete the “Participation Form” online with an automated submission by email.

Once they had signed up to participate in the project each person was sent a Demographic Profile inquiry for completion. The form requested contact information, identification of geographic location, church affiliation, length of membership, age accepted Christ, current age, ethnicity, occupation, income, education, parental spiritual make-up, weekly attendance to church, marital status, children statistics, and spiritual

practices (Bible study attendance, etc.) To accommodate timeliness, a deadline for submission was given at least seven days before the first session.

After submission of the Demographic Profile Inquiry, each person was sent instructions to sign-up for the virtual learning environment and meeting environment for the project. To help with technology challenges to navigate the virtual platforms, an additional session was set-up one day before the class was to start. During this session, it allowed the Instructor the opportunity to assist anyone who was having difficulty setting up his or her profiles in the virtual learning or meeting environment. User names and passwords were created for the participants for the learning environment. Additionally, Session One was scheduled by sending an invitation to the participant's email for the virtual meeting. For those that joined the pre-session, a walk-through was facilitated indicating how to log onto the virtual meeting site and how to utilize their internal computer microphones to enable audible communication between all participants and the instructor during the sessions. The virtual meeting site was equipped with recording capabilities, chat, audible two-way conversation, document sharing and desktop sharing by the instructor.

In addition to aiding those with technology challenges, this pre-session gave an opportunity for participants to meet and provide a comfort zone for the next five working sessions. After completion of the pre-session, documents for the first class were uploaded onto the virtual learning environment. The Program Description, overview of the Curriculum outline, Life-Plan template and the Pre-Test were uploaded onto the long-distant learning site.

Implementation

The framework for constructing the Christian Life Plan addressed the following areas:

Session One:	Overview, Pre-test, Initial Category: Career
Session Two:	Overview of previous category and new categories: Income and Education
Session Three:	Overview of previous category and new categories: Parenting and Social Relationships
Session Four:	Overview of previous category and new categories: Spiritual Relationships and Retirement
Session Five:	Certificates of Completion, Post-Test

Each session was one hour in length. Scheduled tasks included an overall description of what was to be completed, an objective for the session, and an introduction of the category along with group discussion. Each category was discussed and scripture references given for that category. Participants were encouraged to have an open dialogue and ask questions. Near the end of the hour, participants were instructed to transfer their thoughts onto the Life Plan template that was provided. At least one transfer was completed and questions answered regarding the process. The remaining thoughts were to be transferred into the template prior to the next meeting. Overviews of the previous topics were discussed at the beginning of each new session.

Session One started with an introduction of all persons, in particular those who had not joined in the help-session the day before. The project description was given and questions answered. At this point the first glitch of the process surfaced – the lack of technology skills of those who were participating. It was necessary to spend an additional twenty minutes assisting those who had difficulty, but had not participated in

the help-session. With this delay it was realized that on the Demographic Profile Inquiry, the technological experience of each person would have been useful to anticipate how much time would be necessary for this segment of the process. With this vital information, time adjustments could have been made in small increments throughout the process to allow adequate time for the learning curve of those without technological experience.

With everyone successfully logged into the virtual learning environment they were able to see the documents, but downloading them was a challenge. To expedite the process and negate the learning curve for use of the site, the pre-test was emailed to each participant, since they were comfortable with the technology of email. Once all had received a pre-test the next ten minutes were designated to give instructions and to complete them. They were emailed to the researcher upon completion.

In the remaining thirty minutes the areas of interest were discussed and the desktop of the instructor was shared to accommodate understanding. The areas of interest for the project were identified and it was noted that they matched the targeted areas in which influence priorities were made on the pre-test. The first topic was addressed, discussed and biblical references evaluated. The participants were given instructions on what and how to address the first topic and then asked to complete it as homework before the next working session. After each session, the audio recording was reviewed and stored by the researcher.

Session Two provided insight into the process or system being developed for this and subsequent projects. Since only one area was addressed in the previous session, there was sufficient time to address the new areas of concern and the biblical scriptures that

referenced them. The weekly topics were introduced, desktop shared to show the schedule for the week. The uses of online tools were introduced to identify career choices and salaries that would accommodate decisions being made. Several tools included in the virtual classroom were evaluated and research done via the Internet.

Although there were minimal questions regarding the topic of the previous session, the difficulty came in teaching the participants to transfer the information onto the Life-Plan template that was provided. In retrospect, the use of an Excel spreadsheet may not have been the best format as the Christian Life Plan template. Perhaps with more preparation time, a database template would have been easier to manage for the participants. After session two was concluded, it was discovered that the audio did not remain active; therefore there was not audio to be evaluated.

Session Three brought a comfort zone with the technology and a new excitement about the project of the Life Plan. People were making quantitative decisions about careers, ministries and relationships. They were seeing the scriptures in a different light as we worked together to unveil the mysteries of the gospel. Exegesis of the scriptures took on a new importance with each topic. The project took on new life with the launching new technology skills, identifying decisions that were necessary and validating them with scripture.

One man decided to pursue his love of music by becoming a Minister of Music, but decided to not quit his job when he researched the process for making a living in this field. A woman decided to launch a non-profit she had been contemplating after doing research using the tools we explored. Still another decided to return to school and finish her degree after calculating the income needed to operate her household and projecting

the additional amount needed over the next five years as her children grew. There was a general amazement of the ease of communicating, learning and interacting while thousands of miles apart and doors were being opened to new methodologies for learning.

Session Four continued to provide new insights and discussion increased regarding scripture references. New tools for examining scripture were introduced in electronic and hard copy formats. Additional electronic devices were suggested as a way to develop a closer spiritual walk through smart phones and tablets with the use of electronic Bibles and reference materials. Several online biblical sites were introduced and discount bookstores for resources. The template process was easing and all seemed to be satisfactorily curious with new discoveries in scripture, technology and opportunities.

Session Five was the catch-up session designed to help anyone who was having difficulties with anything, but all others were free not to attend. Those that joined session five needed assistance with quantitative decisions, so we jointly reviewed the topics of difficulty and brainstormed with one another. The result was a candid discussion regarding identifying your purpose in Christ and finding ways to reach that purpose. We exchanged details regarding the divine intervention in the lives of some as they tried to find their purpose. Only two people attended the fifth session, but those that did were ready for graduation in session six.

Session six proved to be the most challenging. Six of the eight participants had things that prohibited them from attending. From deaths to births and illness seemed to interfere with the plans at hand. It took approximately three weeks to get everyone together to complete the sixth session. After the final two topics were addressed, the

post-test was administered and emailed to the instructor. The Life Plans developed by the participants were not submitted, but they were asked to give feedback on the process itself. Although not submitted, participants were encouraged to keep updating the plan as things changed in their lives. As a living document, the need to change with circumstances was expected. Certificates of Completion were emailed to participants and as we concluded the project some thought they might do it again. The final questionnaire was completed and the session ended three weeks late.

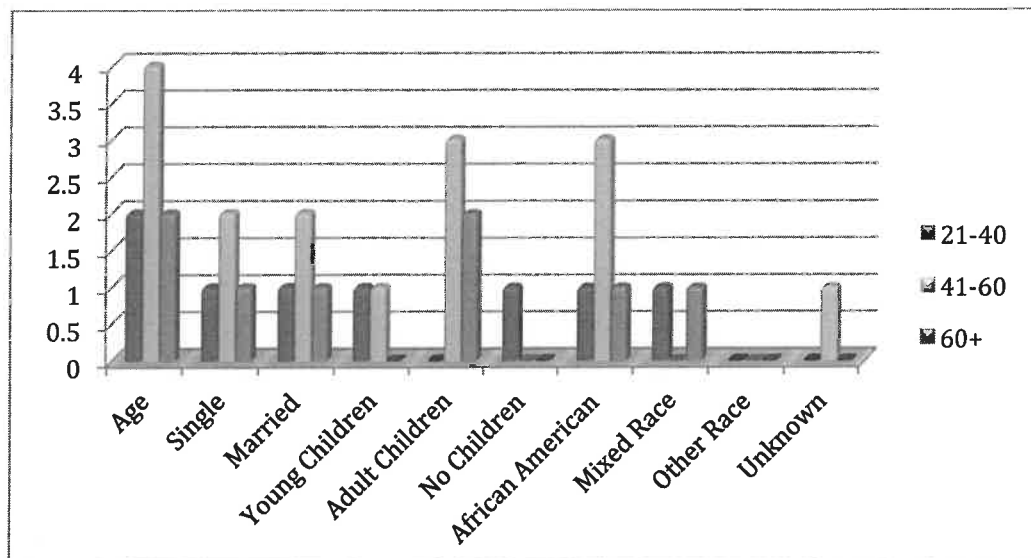
Measureable Results

The Development of a Christian Life Plan project was held in five working sessions, with a sixth session available for anyone who needed additional assistance. There were eight participants that completed the program and their demographic information is provided in the next few paragraphs.

Two of the eight participants or twenty-five percent were between the ages of twenty-one to forty years of age. Four of the eight participants, or fifty percent, were between the ages of forty-one to sixty years of age. The remaining two participants, or twenty-five percent, were over sixty years of age. The group was divide evenly between those with a marital status of single and married.

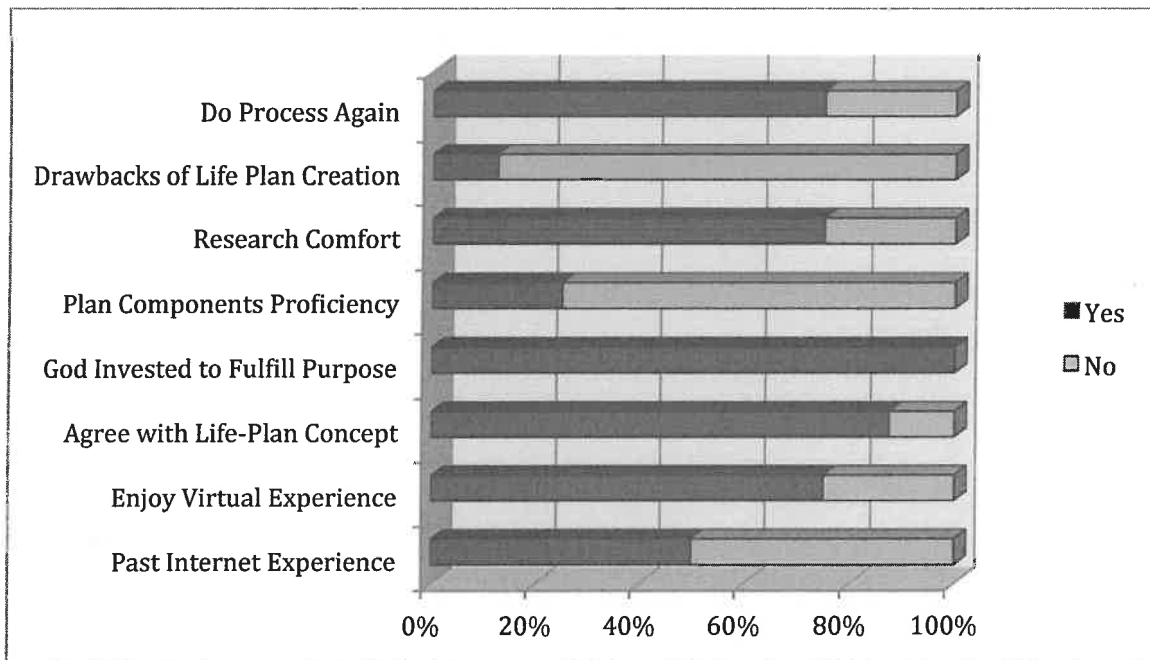
Seven of the eight participants had children (or eighty-seven and a half percent), and within this group fifty-seven percent (or four) had adult children no longer living at home. The racial make-up of the participants was five African-Americans (sixty-two and a half percent), two of mixed race (twenty-five percent) and one that chose not to disclose their race (twelve and a half percent).

Visual Representation of Data 1



Since the project was implemented on a virtual platform, technology became a key component to be considered. For fifty percent (four of the eight participants) it was their first time working on a virtual platform, but seventy-five percent (six of the eight participants) enjoyed the experience and appreciated the opportunity to participate in a class via the Internet. Seventy-five percent enjoyed the research, which was primarily on the Internet and helped participants develop at least a basic understanding of doing Internet research.

Visual Representation of Data 2

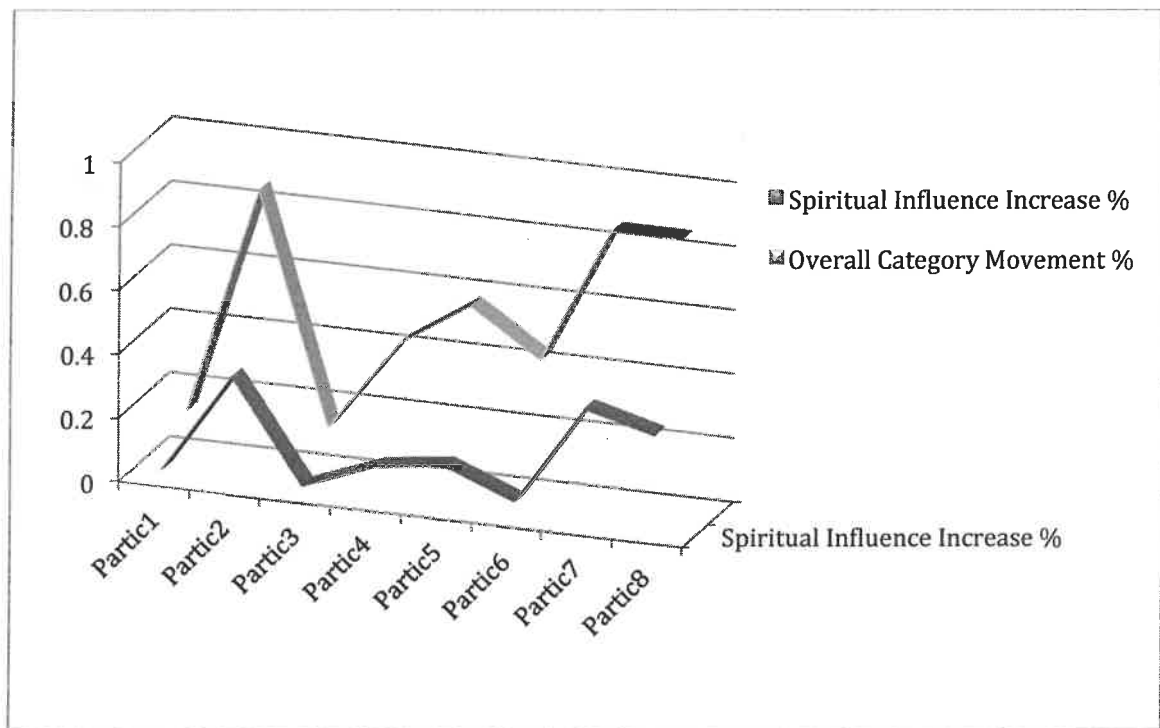


The overall objective of the project was to encourage participants to initiate their own theological anthropology, or to take steps in becoming a disciple in Christ through this process. For this reason, the effectiveness of the project is measured by scriptural influence in the lives of the participants with particular focus on the seven categories addressed: career, income, parenting, education, social relationships, retirement and spiritual relationships. These categories were chosen because of their ultimate impact on the lives of people and subsequent generations to come. Using the prioritization given to each category in the pre-test, the amount of movement toward spiritual influence could be measured. By comparing the pre-test and the post-test prioritizations the following was discovered.

Spiritual influence gained a significant increase following the project implementation for all participants, with the average increase being 17.50%. Spiritual influence increased by at least one category for all participants and an average of three

categories for the group. By understanding what the scriptures say about the subject participants had the opportunity to increase their knowledge of the scriptures while growing in faith. Participants were learning to look at scriptures with different eyes and to relate them to their lives in a practical manner.

Visual Representation of Data 3



SUMMARY

The summary of the project implemented is that it gave new life to scriptures through greater understanding of the Biblical text and enabled increased faith for the participants. As parallels between the biblical text and life's challenges were examined, doors to discipleship were being opened. The project's greatest asset was the use of the authority given by God and the faith that the scripture always accomplishes the tasks it is purposed to do. The project greatest achievement was its predestined ability to access the

faith of others through expose to the scriptures. Increased exposure of scripture and its understanding naturally increases the faith for those using it.

Increased levels of faith provide a revolving benefit. Greater understanding of the biblical text reveals the heart and character of God, and so the relationship is greater. An increased relationship with God raises your trust in Christ through elevated faith. The more a person knows about God, the closer they become and subsequently this gives way to ease in use of the authority of God in life circumstances. It is logical to see how building a Life Plan and making life decisions are enabled through discipleship. Though not every participant was willing to repeat the process, each participant demonstrated that the scriptures and their faith had increased influence over the decision they made in life.

On a very small scale, this project provides the beginning of a framework to reveal the potential of utilizing the ancient text to combat postmodern challenges successfully. Technology proved to be an innovative challenge while promising to increase the productivity of strategic planning of life events. The practical application of the use of the biblical text taught fundamental skills in exegesis to the member in a way that effectively made good use of their time while being cost-effective.

Without the need to leave their homes, participants were introduced to practical tools of research and were able to embrace technology as they fellowshiped and learned together, while thousands of miles apart. The digital divide and spiritual enlightenment came together enabling transformation and increased levels of faith. Those that had never attempted a virtual learning environment found a new source of practical use for their Internet system. New technology coupled with new methodology and tools for research, strategic planning and analysis of need made their participation apart of a greater growing

experience. As the understanding of the member increases a new ownership of faith and church fellowship is enabled making longevity a real prospect.

In its concept, the process of designing a framework for the development of a Christian Life Plan, it is realized that it is just a repackaging of teaching Discipleship. Somewhat less traditional it models what is possible in a technologically savvy postmodern era using the tools that are available. Since the beginning, God has enabled greater understanding of the scriptures through servant-leaders in the church. Transformation of the mind enables greater faith and building a relationship with Christ is a pre-requisite for discipleship. These concepts are fundamental and have been apart of the church outreach for centuries. In spite of this, the lack of newness does not diminish the possibility of this project being an effective tool for discipleship. This is true because small steps in understanding create giant results in faith.

It is the job of every minister and believer in God to tell the good news of Christ. As God's appointed representatives we are literally the extremities used to reach the people of the world. As God calls the creation, we must disciple them in order that they may continue to walk toward God and maintain their place in the family of faith. When individuals are changed and perceptions are transformed, generational faith is born. This project provides a glimmer of hope in our efforts to help sustain the church, but is a tool that activates the Spirit of God in the Christian by correlating life with the intentions, grace and authority of God – even in a postmodern environment.

FUTURE PROJECT IMPROVEMENTS

As you celebrate the success in projects it is equally important to acknowledge the challenges and lessons learned from them. The geographic challenge of the context for

this project worked both for it (because it mandated innovation) and against it because of the increased margin for error. Time management, increased probabilities of technology issues and the threat of alienating those who fear technology were valid concerns.

An attempt to implement a project to a geographic district that extends itself to fifteen states, 214 churches and 256 thousand members is ambitious to say the least. As ambition gave way to necessity, the use of an innovative implementation strategy became essential. Although pleased with the results, it is acknowledged that in hindsight, things could have been more proficient. Greater time (or possibly a subset of the intended district) may have been a better selection for a context. The time necessary to simply identify key players in the church arena, adhere to political protocols and to access targeted areas for the best coverage - consumed nearly twice the time anticipated. Although the strategy to introduce the concept of the project to those who had the authority to promote the project, the surprise came in how many of the supervising officers agreed but how few of the members joined the project. Many of those leaders who were contacted that were in support of the efforts of the project, could not entice their membership to participate in greater numbers.

In retrospect, it is believed that they did not understand the concept of the project because it was not explained sufficiently. It is incredibly difficult to explain an innovative project without encountering some mistrust, so the explanation may have been insufficient to avoid this. There was far more of a positive support from the Presiding Elders who oversee the pastoral positions of their district than from the actual pastors who are assigned. Perhaps there was a perception that the project provided undue competition for a pastoral position or they lacked the confidence in the developer or the

instructor that developed the project. Whatever the case, the number of participants was a disappointment.

Follow-up of correspondences, explanation of project objectives, development of an Internet presence to accommodate registration and securing the necessary documents to go forward were a major undertaking. It seemed at times there were no inquiries at all, then they came at once in flurries. In spite of the inquiries there were only eight participants who completed the project. For future projects of this type it would be far more effective to identify a subset of the desired target and have concentrated promotion and advertisements for a minimum of sixty days.

Geographic challenges mandated the use of technological tools that could negate miles while ensuring effectiveness of communication. With an understanding of the value of communication in learning, the need to create a comfort zone was essential, particularly because the objective was packaged in technology. Developing a personal Life plan is not a routine task and is not widely practiced in the church environment. Discipleship packaged as Life Planning can be a deterrent for people who are not comfortable with change; and if you factor in the technological component, it can multiply the difficulties.

Executing a new project with new technology even on an old subject lends itself to frustration, so it was necessary to seek out tools that were easy to use and cost effective. The land of virtual reality fortunately is made sensible with the wide usage of smart phones. Conceptually, it is no longer far fetched to be able to do in minutes what it used to take hours to complete. The widespread use of email and social media has started to remove the barriers of the digital divide.

Regardless of the acceptance of the concept, actuation is always more complicated. Acknowledging that it took twice as much effort to identify, secure and work through the logistics of the virtual platforms is necessary. In spite of the common usage of social media, long distance learning platforms can be complicated to start. There is a definite learning curve in their use and this adds to not only the frustration of the participants, but for the instructor as well.

For future classes or projects of this manner, more time will be allotted for obtaining proficiency of use for long-distance learning sites. The back-end technology necessary to manage files, create profiles and do what seems easy (like allocating grades) can be very difficult. Use of proprietary ‘off-the-shelf’ program software that can be modified to meet the needs of the class may be a better use of resources. It is almost guaranteed that this software will be costly and will require additional time to become proficient in its use, prior to utilizing it for this purpose. Establishing a permanent to semi-permanent relationship with long-distance learning sites is advantageous because it minimizes the learning curve for all.

With the increased use of technology comes the probability of technology failure. When technology works it is the wonder given from God, but when it falls short it can feel like the touch of hades. The old saying that if you really want to mess something up – use a computer, is especially true in this age of technology. With all the bells and whistles, technology is still machinery interacting with humanity and has the inherent flaws of its developers. Frozen computer screens, software with glitches and the ever-present human error were present and accounted for in this project.

Future endeavors cannot guarantee it will have perfect technology, but it can decrease the probability of error by using the appropriate tools. With the cost of free comes the expense of ineffectiveness. BETA sites, shareware and other low cost options are not always productive tools that minimize frustrations. Projects for the future will have the benefit of learning from incidents in this first round of sessions. After the completion of the project there was an increased motivation to find more proficient sites and developers to facilitate Christian Life Planning using a virtual platform. It will be money well spent to decrease the probability of error and ease the use of tools that make such a difference in productivity.

It would be ideal to believe that the only flaws were those out of my control, but in reality this process revealed needed correction in essential parts such as the areas of focus. Six of the eight participants had difficulty clearly understanding the target areas and how they correlated with an overall Life Plan. Areas of concern were categorization issues and the fact that they were too broad to be effective. A clearer understanding of the overall objectives of transformation of perception needed to be better understood. The reality is that we do not change our lives, but merely our perception of life. God is with us whether we accept it or not and it is only with 'perception transformation' that we are changed to enable us to see and identify God in our circumstances. Faith is the perception that takes place when our minds are transformed to enable us to hear Christ. Transformation is the lynchpin to discipleship, but cannot be reached without increasing levels of faith.

In an effort to make the lessons of Life Planning practical the overall concept of transformation had to be minimized. As a minister of the church I constantly struggle

with perception of new converts. Until they can feel the invisible hand of God and see the movement of the wind of God's activities it remains difficult to explain how tangible God really is. Reaching the 'unchurched' in our own communities is domestic missionary work - exaggerated.

Demystifying the greatest miracle of all ages is not for the weak of heart. On the one hand it is necessary to reveal the wonder of God in all its glory; but a thin line is walked between religiosity and being a fanatic especially in a postmodern environment. If the line is crossed the minister effectively negates their influence to anyone that is touched. So, without fanatics the minister is responsible for describing the magnificence of the Creator (to the people) that their finite minds cannot understand. As you walk the line often you wander from the path into secularism.

It is important that Practical Theology be practical, but does not work if made common. People, even in a postmodern environment are seeking God and the love of God for their souls. Until the heart is captured by the love of God, the minister must be careful not to increase the confusion by going too far. Each phase of discipleship must be clarified to assure a firm biblical foundation and understanding. For future projects or classes on Christian Life Planning there is a need to create a series of steps leading to fundamental understandings of Christ.

Attempting to multi-task while giving instruction over a virtual platform caused the error in audio communication for session two. Although I checked to assure the recording was activated, it somehow cut off within the first few minutes of the class. It was not until the end of class that this was realized and vital data was lost from this session. With the usage of proprietary 'off-the-shelf' software it is hoped that there will

be an indicator that will alert the staff of the recording stopping. Even if this type of off-the-shelf software does not include this feature, it is an easy change for a good Programmer and will lessen the occurrence of this type of problem.

For future Life Planning sessions, there needs to be a team approach to assure all aspects are covered completely. The same vigor used to develop the curriculum is the same needed in the development of a team of people dedicated to domestic mission work. As a team, the participants will gain the maximum impact of the project. With one person dedicated to exegesis of the biblical text, another designing the forms for the Life Plan, others dedicated to seamless integration of the Life Plan components and still others working exclusively on technology issues – the Instructor need only worry about the needs associated with teaching the participants. In essence, a team approach will allow concentration of efforts to assure minimal error and omissions. Participants will benefit from the full attention of the instructor that does not have to worry about audio, video and logistics errors.

The problem with developing a team is the ability to pay for a team. With a single person administrating the project, costs can be kept as a minimal. Sound and video technicians can be costly, which would increase the possibility that the Life Planning sessions would no longer be free. If we could incorporate the series of steps in other aspects of ministry in the church, the cost could be consumed by the normal activities of the church. Since the local church is already established as a hub of volunteer services to the communities, lay leaders could be trained to incorporate specific areas of the sessions into whatever is already happening in the church.

The entire process of strategic planning to make disciples is a logical fit for lessons, policies and activities of the church as it ministers to its people. Newly converted and existing members could be indoctrinated into discipleship in a manner that provides knowledge and can incorporate fellowship with others. Understanding the basic concepts of strategic planning and usage of smart tools for increased productivity are practical for any number of activities already done in the church.

The project of making disciples by increasing the influence of the scriptures in the lives of the members of the church is essential for every denomination. The course can be individualized to prescribe to the doctrine of the church and easily incorporated in segments of Bible Study, Vacation Bible School and Sunday School. By incorporating the strategies and basic elements of the program into routine church activities it expedites the discipleship process and may add new life to church activities.

Various segments of the church community may even be established to meet the needs of that particular group. Young people can explore common decisions made in their lives for high school, dating, and any number of life events that they may share. Understanding what Jesus thinks about the situations of life regardless of age is important. Young people may actually benefit more than those older because they would have less of a learning curve when comes to using technology for their development and research of vital subject areas.

Single ministries could establish sessions that incorporate budgeting and parenting classes. By expanding the curriculum to include associated areas of interest, there is a greater excitement generated for participation. Understanding issues surrounding dating, dating as a parent and divorce or separation issues can turn these

sessions into magnets for greater community involvement, especially if they are free. When advertised properly, the establishment of these classes at revolving times of the year, could be an excellent evangelism tool for the community.

Groups for married people are also a natural venue for the Life Plan classes. Practical advice and research concerning common marital issues and problems help to bring new meaning to the subject matter. Budgeting and helping married couples learn to make decisions together can be key in maintaining healthy relationships in the church. New career decisions with retrospect to the needs of growing children, college plans and life events can make these sessions very desirable and help to bring others into the church.

Guest speakers will make it seem less like a classroom activity and add a twist to the sessions taught. Quite often local events at churches include well-known speakers that help small churches to fundraise. The church might also consider planning retreats for men or women that focus on issues pertaining to the group and how to grow in discipleship for Christ. Upon leaving the retreat, the man or woman participating will have a physical or mental plan of action that can be easily translated and incorporated into a Christian Life Plan. If the auxiliary or modules of learning in the church compartmentalize the Life Plan process, the congregant need only be guided through the assembly of the Christian Life Plan at whatever time deemed appropriate as a celebration of Discipleship training.

There is no magic in what you call the process, but the divine intervention into the life of the person is the magic of the gospel manifested to the glory of God. Whether the church identifies the process as one that ‘finds the purpose’ or creates a Life Plan is

irrelevant – but rather that the person at the end of the journey has a transformed definition of who and whose they are. Identification as one who is a Disciple of Christ is drastically different than one who is a member of the church, and it is that difference that creates longevity as a member.

Those transformed from membership to Discipleship shall become the future of the church and the backbone for Evangelism. When the mind is transformed it is free to examine, explore and celebrate the life it has become. The person being transformed by the biblical principles of Jesus, the Christ will never be the same again, nor will the people that they ultimately influence. Generations are impacted when minds are changed and committed to a new way of life that is not self-centered, but is willing to do as commanded by Christ: to love their neighbor in the same way they love themselves (Matthew 19:19).

After recognizing the significance and life-changing attributes of the biblical text, these new Disciples will generously share their faith, because they care for their neighbors and their souls; as they do for their own. Creating an Evangelistic launching pad equates to not only increasing the number of people in the church; but the characteristics of those who are joining the family of faith. People generally influence those who have similar lifestyle values; thus the face of the future church is reflected in those who take life serious enough to plan its future, in Christ.

Regardless of the venue or the targeted event, discipleship training is always a good idea. New converts, existing members, founding members and those in the greater community need the skills necessary to become a disciple for Christ and what better

added benefit than the development of a personalized Christian Life Plan that helps to carve out a path toward God that is consistent with the purpose of the participant's life.

What would Jesus do can take on new connotations when the targeted audience is for the glorification of God. People are looking for real love and Christ has the love that will warm their hearts, set their souls free and give them everlasting life.

APPENDIX A
PROJECT CURRICULUM

Curriculum: Absolutely U
Discipleship Project

Session 1:

- A. Completion of the “Context Questions WD” by each Participant after brief introduction of course; but without in-depth explanations of course detail.
- B. Following completion of “Context Questions WD”, further explanation of course objectives, goals and process.

Introduction of Program: This project was launched in efforts to earn a Doctorate of Ministry degree for an African Methodist Episcopal Pastor in the Southern California Conference - in the 5th Episcopal District - of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. The project itself was launched for this purpose, but was initiated over a life-time of us of my own personal Life-Plan, constructed without benefit of scriptural influence. As a pastor in the local church, my personal theology is that God has already given us everything we need to live according to Godly principals, victoriously here on earth. It is also my theology that God is actively involved in our lives and that each Believer was created with a specific purpose in mind, and that discovery of that Godly purpose is key for victorious living - as God intended. This project is intended as a Christian Discipleship Tool to increase the effectiveness of our lives by drawing direct correlations between Biblical interpretations and practical life circumstances.

Objectives: To assist each Christian Participant in the development of a personal Life-Plan by outlining a logical process of development utilizing Biblical concepts and principals as the chief influence. In addition, this project will encourage Christian Participants to use the techniques associated with strategic planning and research to identify essential components that need to be changed in their personal lives over a 10 year period in order to change those elements they deem inadequate for victorious living.

Goals: Utilization of Biblical scriptures and principals as effective guides and tools for life changes and working through practical life circumstances. This will be done by exposing Christian Participants to the use of strategies and research to develop a customized Life-Plan. Finally, it is the goal of this project to decrease the overall fear of Christians in the local church from Participating in virtual instruction in the African-American community.

Process: The process used to engage in this project is that each Participant will log onto a Virtual Classroom one time per week for approximately 60 minutes, utilizing the virtual classroom edmodo.com and a secondary web based communication site: Webex.

1. Each Participant has been provided a “log-in” URL code and will be called by first name only during the process.
2. Each Participant will utilize their telephones to call into a virtual conference utilizing Webex, where they may either upload or discuss any questions regarding the previous lessons.
3. The 60 minutes session will be broken into two segments: Instruction and Feedback.

The first 45 minutes will be of instruction regarding the current and overview of the past component for the week. Each component will be explained and Biblical scriptures provided that speak to that particular component(s). There will be discussions that will unpack the Biblical scriptures regarding each subject matter.

4. Feedback: The last 15 minutes of each session is allotted time for Feedback regarding current session, its content, its impact or whatever pertinent data the Participant would like to give. This will be done in a on-line blogging sections accessible through the virtual classroom of edmodo.com or via a pre-established “Quiz” with questions they can respond to each week.

C. Introduction of Subject Component:

Career: A field for or in pursuit of consecutive progressive achievement especially in public, professional or business life.

Job: A work that a person does regularly in order to earn money

so

A career is a pursuit of progressive achievement in a desired profession or business, with the job as the role and duties to be associated with the pursuit of achievement within the desired profession or business sought.

- Is there a cost of achievement? When advancement in any given field is sought by an individual there is ALWAYS a cost to pay. Whether education, sweat-equity, hours, and of course money.
- Is there a cost of change? Making a change from any situation has an attached cost often monetary; always real. What are some of the costs associated with change?

God has destined each of us with a purpose and I believe that the innate skills, passions, and desires of our heart were established so that we may seek God’s purpose for our lives.

What does God say about careers? Consider these scriptures:

1. Exodus 9:16
2. Proverbs 19:21
3. Job 36:5
4. Isaiah 46:10,11
5. Romans 8:28
6. 1 Corinthians 3:8
7. 2 Corinthians 5:5
8. Ephesians 1:11
9. Philippians 2:13
10. 2 Timothy 1:9

Curriculum: Absolutely U Discipleship Project

Session 2:

Review of Previous Component: Career

- * Progress of Participants: research, identifying goals, decisions for change
- * Were scriptures helpful for making decisions or finding guidance?
- Research Tools: helpful or confusing — discussion

Introduction of Subject Components: Income & Education

* **INCOME:** The amount of monies that flow through your personal household and you may access for changes, improvements, or savings.

Most people would agree that we can all use a little more money in our lives; but there is a difference between what is wanted and needed. Knowing what is needed as income to assure all needs are met is essential for keeping on a budget. As the years pass by expenses will increase and it is important that our household income increases as well. Looking at the career choices made - will the income from this choice be sufficient to meet increasing expenses ... for how long ... if, not what can you do to increase your income?

* **EDUCATION:** The formal training and educational attainment that enables progression and elevation of income and / or positional status of employment possibilities.

Getting more education is one way of potentially increasing your income. With more education you become more qualified to do whatever career choice you've made. If education is a consideration for you, how far do you need to go in order to achieve your desired goal? (Bachelors, Masters, LVN, RN, CNE, etc.) How far is that from where you are now (6 mod, 2 years, 5 year etc.)? Have you researched what career you want, what income it pays and how much education you need in order to be in the position desired?

- **Is there a cost of achievement?** When advancement in any given field is sought by an individual there is ALWAYS a cost to pay. Whether education, sweat-equity, hours, and of course money.
- * **Is there a cost of change?** Making a change from any situation has an attached cost often monetary; always real. What are some of the costs associated with change?

What does God say about 'Income' and 'Education'? Consider these scriptures:

INCOME:

- * Proverbs 15:6
- * 1 Corinthians 16
- * Luke 18:12

- * Genesis 14:20
- * Ecclesiastes 5:10
- * Proverbs 16:8
- * Matthew 6:21
- * Deuteronomy 14:22
- * Hebrews 7:5 .

EDUCATION

1. Proverbs 16:15 -16
2. Proverbs 10:14
3. Colossians 2:8
4. Romans 12:2
5. Hosea 4:6

Curriculum: Absolutely U Discipleship Project

Session 3:

Review of Previous Component: 1) Education & 2) Income

- * Progress of Participants: research, identifying goals, decisions for change
- * Were scriptures helpful for making decisions or finding guidance?
- Research Tools: helpful or confusing — discussion

Introduction of Subject Components: Parenting & Social Relationships

* PARENTING: The methodology used to raise your children / grandchildren that will produce the long-term desired results for them and you.

In my interaction with other parents & grandparents I have found that the biggest question is what do you want for your children or grands? Most people say “I just want them to be happy.”, but forget that ‘happiness is a choice’ and unless you teach this they probably would not know. God provides the peace and joy for our lives - but happiness is our choice. Raising kids has no instruction manual; but like everything else it helps to be able to identify what you want the end results to be. Quantifying this information makes it that much clearer.

* SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS: Those relationships with members outside of your immediate family that you value and / or may be useful in elevating economic / social / spiritual results.

Relationships in our lives are mini-contracts between us and someone else. Ever had a success in your life and the people you thought would be happy for you - got an attitude instead? Ever been down and needed someone only to find the ones you thought would support you - unavailable? That’s because you changed the terms of the unwritten

contract between you. The best relationships are the ones that allow growth and change of the unwritten terms. Think of a close relationship and identify what the your terms are with them. Are you the strong one? Smart one? Helpful one? No nonsense one? or perhaps you allow them to be blatantly ugly with the minimal amount of complaints.

What does God say about 'Parenting' and 'Social Relationships'? Consider these scriptures:

PARENTING:

- * Proverbs 22:6
- * Proverbs 29:15
- * Psalm 127:3-5
- * Leviticus 19:29
- * Proverbs 20:11
- * 2 Timothy 3:14-17
- * Matthew 19:14
- * 1 Timothy 5:8

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS:

- * Psalm 34:1-22
- * Galatians 5:1
- * Jeremiah 1-5
- * Luke 10:25 – 37
- * 1 Corinthians 6:11, 13, 19, 20

Curriculum: Absolutely U Discipleship Project

Session 4:

Review of Previous Component: 1) Parenting & 2) Social Relationships

- * Progress of Participants: research, identifying goals, decisions for change
- * Were scriptures helpful for making decisions or finding guidance?
- Research Tools: helpful or confusing — discussion

Introduction of: Spiritual Relationships & Retirement

* Spiritual Relationships: Those relationships that edify your spiritual well-being (God, church, church members, ministry, etc.)

We were created in three parts: Spirit, soul and body and each must be nourished if we are to find peace and balance in our lives. For each part we have relationships with others that nourish those parts of our lives and it is important to realize their value and their limitations.

* Retirement: The viable means of income available to you after you voluntarily or involuntarily leave your given profession or work on a full-time basis.

Retirement is one of those subjects that all must consider. To retire in comfort it is necessary to carve out savings or plan for income that is continuous even if we cannot or choose not to work. Social Security is a supplement to our retirement plans, but may not be around much longer, so depending on your age significant plans may need to be made in order to meet your financial obligations after retirement.

What does God say about 'Spiritual Relationships' and 'Retirement'? Consider these scriptures:

Spiritual Relationships:

- * *Proverbs 13:20*
- * *Colossians 3:23*
- * *Hebrews 10:24,25*
- * *Ephesians 4:2,3*
- * *Proverbs 3:10,11*
- * *John 3:3*
- * *2 Corinthians 6:14, 18*
- * *Genesis 2:18*
- * *Proverbs 17:17*
- * *Proverbs 18:24*

Retirement:

- * *Proverbs 13:22*
- * *Psalms 90:16, 17.*
- * *Psalms 37:25*
- * *2 Samuel 7:28*
- * *Luke 14:28*
- * *Isaiah 43:19*
- * *Luke 16:11*
- * *Ecclesiastes 6:3*

**Curriculum: Absolutely U
Discipleship Project**

Session 5/6:

Brief Overview of:

- * CAREER: A career is a pursuit of progressive achievement in a desired profession or business, with the job as the role and duties to be associated with the pursuit of achievement within the desired profession or business sought.
- * EDUCATION: The formal training and educational attainment that enables progression and elevation of income and / or positional status of employment possibilities.
- * INCOME: The amount of monies that flow through your personal household and you may access for changes, improvements, or savings.

* PARENTING: The methodology used to raise your children / grandchildren that will produce the long-term desired results for them and you.

* SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS: Those relationships with members outside of your immediate family that you value and / or may be useful in elevating economic / social / spiritual results.

* SPIRITUAL RELATIONSHIPS: Those relationships that edify your spiritual well-being (God, church, church members, ministry, etc.)

We were created in three parts: Spirit, soul and body and each must be nourished if we are to find peace and balance in our lives. For each part we have relationships with others that nourish those parts of our lives and it is important to realize their value and their limitations.

• RETIREMENT: The viable means of income available to you after you voluntarily or involuntarily leave your given profession or work on a full-time basis.

The seven (7) elements that make up the 'Life-Plan' development are basic components in the cycle of everyday life. Construction of the plan is not intended to be stagnant; but evolving in its development and implementation. Life-Plans, like any plan, are only effective with actual implementation - for without implementation they are merely good ideas. It is said that "... the graveyard is full of good intentions ..." and we can only imagine how much better the world would be if some of those 'good ideas' had come to fruition.

Each element of the Life-Plan builds upon the previous element and each can be interdependent on the others. The **career** is dependent on the financial needs to facilitate the life-style of the developer. The **education** is needed to facilitate the advancement of the **career**. **Parenting** is an option, but once decided (voluntarily or not) is a reality that impacts the needs in the areas of **career, education, social and spiritual relationships**. Irrespective if a child is considered, the lifestyle and quality of life of the Developer are still impacted by the same elements. Consequently, the entire spectrum impacts the plans for **retirement**.

A Life-Plan is not a mandatory document to live; but rather a preferred document for those who seek a specific quality and quantity in life. As Christians our theology (or what we believe about God) undergirds all that we do, for it is the purpose of God that we seek for our lives.

As the weeks, months and years go by, the Life-Plan that has been constructed should be modified and evolve as a living document that becomes a guideline for achieving all that God has purposed for your life. Once you have identified the elements, modifications necessary, the cost of the changes it is time to map our **Steps of Implementation**. The steps are like stepping stones in order to reach your appointed and anointed goals in Christ.

Discussion about Implementation:

6. Pray that God will divinely intervene and make clear your steps to His purpose.

7. Re-read the plan and take a step: (i.e. get materials for classes, identify requirements for new job, re-evaluate person commitments, self reflection, etc.
8. Set a timeline to start and measure success of each step.
9. Go FORWARD ... STEP OUT ON FAITH

APPENDIX B
QUESTION DEVELOPMENT

Category	Insight Question	Prioritize Influence
Career: Type of vocation that provides the participant's primary source of income.	What is your career and can you see yourself doing this in ten (10) years. If not what do you want to change?	<input type="checkbox"/> Spouse / Significant Other <input type="checkbox"/> Children / Extended Family <input type="checkbox"/> Income / Resources Available <input type="checkbox"/> Spiritual Relationships / Church
Income: The amount of money that flows through your personal household	Is your current income meeting your family's needs. Will it meet their needs in 10 years. if not what will you need to do to change it to meet your needs.	<input type="checkbox"/> Spouse / Significant Other <input type="checkbox"/> Children / Extended Family <input type="checkbox"/> Income / Resources Available <input type="checkbox"/> Spiritual Relationships / Church
Parenting: How you raise your children / grandchildren that will produce the long-term desired results for them and you.	Are you raising your children/grands as your parents did? If not, why? If yes, are you satisfied with your life? How could you improve their lives?	<input type="checkbox"/> Spouse / Significant Other <input type="checkbox"/> Children / Extended Family <input type="checkbox"/> Income / Resources Available <input type="checkbox"/> Spiritual Relationships / Church
Education: The formal training and educational that enables progress and elevation of income or positional status of employment possibilities.	What marketable skills do you have & are they enough to earn the income you desire for you and your family. If not, what are your plans to change things for the better?	<input type="checkbox"/> Spouse / Significant Other <input type="checkbox"/> Children / Extended Family <input type="checkbox"/> Income / Resources Available <input type="checkbox"/> Spiritual Relationships / Church
Social Relationships: Those relationships with members outside of your immediate family that you value and / or may be useful in elevating economic / social / spiritual results.	Evaluate current social relationships, are they fulfilling the reason that you started them? Do any exist that are grandfathered in; but no longer meeting their objectives?	<input type="checkbox"/> Spouse / Significant Other <input type="checkbox"/> Children / Extended Family <input type="checkbox"/> Income / Resources Available <input type="checkbox"/> Spiritual Relationships / Church
Retirement: The viable means of income available to you after your cannot, or no longer wish to, be gainfully employed	What have you done to prepare for retirement? If nothing, why?	<input type="checkbox"/> Spouse / Significant Other <input type="checkbox"/> Children / Extended Family <input type="checkbox"/> Income / Resources Available <input type="checkbox"/> Spiritual Relationships / Church
Spiritual Relationships: Those relationships that edify your Spiritual Well-being	Have nurture spiritual relationships? Are you satisfied, if not what change do you desire?	<input type="checkbox"/> Spouse / Significant Other <input type="checkbox"/> Children / Extended Family <input type="checkbox"/> Income / Resources Available <input type="checkbox"/> Spiritual Relationships / Church

APPENDIX C
OUTLINE ABSOLUTELY YOU

OUTLINE ABSOLUTELY YOU

I. Discovery: Major Life Segment Influences

First Session: Completion of “Context Questions WD” identifying the degree of influence for each participant’s life in the major life segments: Career, Income, Parenting, Education, Social Relationships, Retirement, and Spiritual Relationships. Influence components are: Spouse / Significant Other, Children / Extended Family, Income / Resources Available and Spiritual Relationships / Church.

Assure Participant understands each Category and how used for exercise.

Each Participant shall identify the level of influence of Influence Component on major life segments by prioritizing the level of influence for each segment by rating it 1 - 5 (with 1 = greatest influence) for all levels for all segments.

Example of Prioritizing Process:

Auto Safety: What is the greatest influence on your decision regarding this subject:

- ☐ Spouse / Significant Other
- ☐ Children / Extended Family
- ☐ Income / Resources Available
- ☐ Spiritual Relationships / Church

The session will include these segments:

Session 1: Introduction of Program in entirety: objectives, goals, process
 Questions and Answers: Clarifications, confidentiality, schedule
 Review of Life-Plan process and worksheet components
 Instruction on completing worksheet components
 Introduction of First Component: Career

Session one is designed for the following objectives:

1. Acknowledge & confirm the intended usage of the Bible for its Believers
2. Recognition of Kingdom principles re: lineage, its privileges, characteristics and boundaries by discovering what the Word of God says about each.
3. Identify a legitimate foundation for growth and / or change.
4. Identification of innate talents and how they match the passions
5. Look at envisioned career choices
6. Establish the cost of change.
7. Reflection Insight (Blogging insight re: session 1 or project ...)

Session one’s Goals:

1. Reinforce and apply biblical principals as a viable source of guidance
2. Increase awareness and recognition of Kingdom principles as lineage and its contributions.
3. Minimize concepts re: barriers and milestones for growth
4. Prepare Participant for component introduced in session and the independent development of this component.

5. Capturing Participant's reflection of process and project (15 minutes)

II. Life-Plan Progression

Session 2:

- A. Review of previous component: Career
- B. Questions, clarifications and assistance with process
- C. Introduction of new component: Income
- D. Unpack the Word: What God says about component introduced
- E. Blogging: Participant's Reflections

Session one is designed for the following objectives:

1. Identify passions, talents and envisioned career choices
2. Introduction of viable skills that may be necessary to reach career goals
3. Discover what God's Word says about career, purpose, etc.
4. Expound upon the power of God and how to access that power through prayer

Session two's Goals:

1. Increase participants ability to draw correlation between innate passions and talents
2. Introduce initial macro view: connectivity of cultural progression & global society
3. Use of biblical principles as they intersect with life
4. Reinforce and apply biblical principals as a viable source of guidance

Session 3:

- A. Secondary look at passions, talents, and skills
- B. Expansion of envisioned career choices
- C. Alternative Career Choices
- D. Unpack the Word
- E. Expand the knowledge of the power of prayer, personal and corporate

Session one is designed for the following objectives:

1. Review and expand choices deemed viable by participants
2. Greater discovery of necessary skills: transferable and not
3. Discover what God's Word says about career, purpose, etc.
4. Owning the power of prayer

Session three's Goals:

1. Expand alternatives for career choices – unleash the power of choice
2. Connect transferability of skills to power of choice
3. Re-visit barriers for expanded view
4. Reinforce validity of biblical principles
5. Reinforce importance of a personal relationship with Christ

APPENDIX D
PASTORAL LETTER

PASTORAL LETTER

Dear Pastor,

Thank you for your time and consideration. Working in ministry is a demanding but rewarding position in God. Ministering to the people of God requires that we reach out to those unsaved; while nurturing and sustaining those who are already within our midst. Those newly converted into the church are coming more frequently with no church experience, so it is necessary that we meet their needs in a way that will sustain within the fold (a.k.a. closing the revolving door).

As a denomination we frequently look for innovative tools to draw and sustain those without church experience; without losing our Christian character. The need for these vital tools is the focus of my project as a Candidate for Doctoral of Ministry degree at United Theological Seminary (Dayton, Ohio). It is for this reason that I write you today for your help.

In an effort to 'close the revolving door' of the newly converted, I am proposing that the use of a Life Plan as a Discipleship tool that will quicken their indoctrination into 'church life'; thereby easing their acceptance and dedication to biblical principles. It is my belief that through this process we can increase the longevity of membership for those newly converted into our faith.

HERE'S IS WHAT I AM PROPOSING:

I am developing a Life Plan curriculum to be taught to a sample group of newly converted and existing members of our local churches across the 5th Episcopal District by way of a virtual classroom (internet classroom). Volunteer members will participate and develop their own personal life plan, using biblical principles over a 6 week period.

- They will be given a pre-test of questions developed to get insight into how their initial decision-making-process and how it engages the precepts of the bible.
- They will participate in a six week (90 minute) online class (1 day per week) to develop their personal Life Plan and provide insight into the process via online journal
- Be given a post-test (of the same questions as the pre-test) to discover if their decision-making-process has changed toward an increasing reliance on biblical principles

It is my hypothesis that the utilization of bible principles into the decision-making-process in life planning will significantly quicken their indoctrination into church life by incorporating these principles into their practical decision-making-process. The end result is Discipleship.

HERE IS WHERE I NEED YOUR HELP:

I am asking that you place the statement below into your Sunday bulletin asking for volunteers for the project:

In order for our denomination to grow and be effective for future generations, we must LIVE BEYOND THE LEGACY and find new and effective ways of discipleship in our churches. Be apart of the growth and participate in an innovative project to grow the members; thereby growing the church. Developing a life plan helps you focus on goals, meet objectives and plan for victorious living in Christ. To participate and benefit from this process go to: <http://www.robinallenministries.org/absolutely-u/4580707594> or go to www.tcorcorporation.org and on the menu look for “ABSOLUTELY |U|” on the drop-down tab under Robin Allen Ministry. The page will explain the project and the you may access the “Participation Form” as well.

If there are those you wish to refer to me, or for questions, you may contact me at:

Pastor Robin C. Allen
rallen1@united.edu
(626) 253-1999 (cell)
(909) 241-8893 (Home)

Thank you for your help for this project.

Sincerely,

Pastor Robbie Allen, M.Div.
D.Min. Candidate

APPENDIX E
LIFE PLAN NUMBERS

LIFE PLAN NUMBERS

Category	Explanation	Starting Point Current Year	Year 2
<p>Career: Type of vocation or primary market that provides the participant's primary source of income.</p> <p>Consider These Scriptures:</p> <p>Exodus 9:16 Proverbs 19:21 Job 36:5 Isaiah 46:10,11 Romans 8:28 1 Corinthians 3:8 2 Corinth 5:5 Ephesians 1:11 Philip 2:13 2Timothy 1:9</p>	<p>What is your career and can you see yourself doing this in ten (10) years. If not what do you want to change?</p>		
List What Should Change	Cost of Change		

APPENDIX F
PARTICIPATION FORMS

Absolutely |U| Project Participation Agreement

Absolutely |U| is a Life-Plan development project to help new and existing church members to develop a 'Life-Plan' for victorious living. Here's what that means: the participants will be guided to identify / discover individual goals and objectives, develop strategies for reaching these goals and anticipate the impact of the strategies on the major aspects of your life. The end result will be a practical Life-Plan to reach their personal goals of life with implementation strategies that take into account major aspects of life. Regardless of your age, occupation or desires for life, a Life-Plan can help you achieve your targeted goals while increasing your biblical knowledge.

By participating in this project you will be a vital part of developing Discipleship tools that create lifelong membership and break barriers for those just entering the faith. Here's what you will need to participate: 1) computer or laptop, 2) internet access, and 3) 1 hour per week to attend for six weeks. Getting started is easy.

Deadline for sign-up is Saturday, July 12, 2014 and the six classes will be: Tuesdays: July 15th, 22nd, 29th; August 5th, 12th and Saturday August 16th at 7PM (PST) for one hour. Upon submission of this form you will receive your screen name and access code for the class.

Disclosure:

No names or information will be used that would reveal any participant's identification, now or in the future. Each participant will be provided a screen name with a personal access code for entry into the virtual classroom. Journal entries by participants will be kept in strict confidence without revealing the identity of the participant and used to analyze the case study effectiveness. Journal entries, while never revealing the identity of the participant, may be used to further develop future 'Discipleship Tools'. By signing this form you are agreeing to participate in this project, in accordance with the above stipulations.

I have read the project description and agree to participate. Please forward my screen-name and access code to the virtual classroom to me at:

_____.

Signed:

_____ Date: ____/____/____

Participant's Information:

Name: _____ State of Residence: _____

Church Name: _____ Pastor's Name: _____

AME Conference: _____ Christian Member since _____

Church Member since _____ Age accepted Christ _____

Current Age _____ Ethnicity _____

Occupation _____ Income: ☐ \$10 - \$30k ☐ \$31 - \$40k
☐ \$41 - \$50k ☐ \$51k +

Education: ☐ HS or Equivalent ☐ Undergrad ☐ Graduate ☐ Other

Parental Christian History ☐ Life-long Christians / Ministers
 (what about your parents?) ☐ Both parents saved
☐ Parent(s) unsaved
☐ One parent saved / not the other

Do you usually attend church each week? ☐ Yes - # of times per week ☐ No

Do you usually attend Bible Study each week? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Marital Status: ☐ Married ☐ Single ☐ Divorced ☐ Widowed
 If Married, does your spouse attend Worship Services with you? ☐ Y ☐ N

Do you have children? ☐ Yes - age(s) _____ ☐ No

Do you bring one or more of your children to church on Sunday(s)? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Do you believe in the Spiritual Gifts? (1 Corinthians 12:4-11) ☐ Yes ☐ No
 If yes, what is/are your Spiritual Gift(s)? _____

Do you read your Bible on your own? If Yes, How often _____ ☐ No

APPENDIX G
SESSION TRANSCRIPTIONS

TRANSCRIPTIONS

Tuesday, October 28, 2014

Review & VERBATIM SET-UP:

Monday 7/21/14 session:

1 day before AU Session #1 - NOT A GOOD IDEA TO WORK THROUGH WITH STUDENTS UNTIL AFTER WORKED THROUGH WITH COLLEAGUE - THEN : WORK WITH STUDENTS FOR THEIR COMFORT AND EDIFICATION — NOT THE CLASS!

Needed to explain two websites for each class serving two purposes:

- Webex.com: for document sharing and hosting of conference
- Edmodo.com: For student platform of assignments and other documents and group joining.

#Two students: 58 & 63 trying to get onto site for Edmodo - difficulty to get log-in and set up accounts.

Next time - so students will not feel like “Test Dummies” or waste their time! unless they agree to their personal learning & edification:

- * Do logistics for sign-in and log-on with someone before you set up classes. Set up dummy student so that Instructor can see what students see.
- * Determine what you want them to see for students
- Get well trained before you start class - do not start without being assure you are able to understand what the students so you can work through the questions.

WORK IT OUT BEFORE YOU TALK TO STUDENTS: CONFIDENCE IN PROFESSIONALISM!

VERBATIM & Review

Tuesday 7/22/14 Session 1:

1. NOTE: Include information before hand of:
 - necessity of downloads to the computer to give comfort of not a virus; but legitimate downloads for use.
 - In addition to workout process of verifying email, log-ins, and etc. *INCREASING KNOWLEDGE OF INTERNET AND VIRTUAL USAGE FOR COMPUTERS.*
2. Assure documents formatted to assure students print correctly without incident or need to reformat.

3. Be sure to think through instructions and process for completing documents to assure easily understood and comprehended. Recheck the document to assure printing cells are not duplicated, so that the student is not confused : ***THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR CLARITY AND COMPREHENSION RESTS ON THE INSTRUCTOR NOT THE STUDENT!***

START @ 1 MINUTE INTO 7/22/14 AUDIO

Explanations rehearse before as if sermon

Explanation of the Syllabus:

* Introduction of Program: This project was launched in efforts to earn a Doctorate of Ministry degree for (for myself) an African Methodist Episcopal Pastor in the Southern California Conference - in the 5th Episcopal District - of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. The project itself was launched for this purpose, but was initiated over a life-time of us of my own personal Life-Plan, As a pastor in the local church, my personal theology is that God has already given us everything we need to live according to Godly principals, victoriously here on earth. It is also my theology that God is actively involved in our lives and that each Believer was created with a specific purpose in mind, and that discovery of that Godly purpose is key for victorious living This project is intended as a Christian Discipleship Tool to increase the effectiveness of our lives by drawing direct correlations between Biblical interpretations and practical life circumstances.

("What we are going to do is...")

* Objectives: To assist each Christian Participant in the development of a personal Life-Plan.

("Go to your syllabus, it says...")

The session will include these segments:

Session 1: Introduction of Program in entirety: objectives, goals, process
Questions and Answers: Clarifications, confidentiality, schedule
Review of Life-Plan process and worksheet components

... this project will encourage Christian Participants to use the techniques associated with strategic planning and research to identify essential components that need to be changed in their personal lives over a 10 year ... (span, it's going to be for the next 10 years that what you are going to project 0 the next 10 years

Instructor: Let me tell you a little bit about why we are doing this. When I was um22 years old — no 24 years old (I'm sorry) my twins were born when I was 24. So I had 3 children under the age of 5, I made \$5 per hour and my husband was abusive. My Mother came to me and said " Robin, what are you going to do?" I said "I have no idea, but I am taking any suggestions you got. OK. She said, "You need a plan for your life" and she helped me draw out a life plan for my own life plan. But my Mother was not ... I was not raised in the church,

Participant ?: Umm

Instructor: *I was raised in the world and got saved when I was 25 years of age. She was a u - she went to church when she was a child in the UMC, consequently, I did not have the benefit of the Word of God on my side. Remember I did this at 24 and didn't get saved until I was 25. So I new something about the bible but very little, so I did the is based on secular viewpoints as I went through my life and my plan for my life - like I said when I started I had 3 small children under the age of five years of age, I was making \$5 an hour and had a I was in an marriage that was abusive - at the end of my 10 year plan I had my bachelor's degree, my children were in school, I owned my own home and I was running a business. ok. My Mom died in the 10th year of the plan. I thought how much better it would have been if I would have saw what God said about these segments of my life - if I had planned it around the ultimate authority. and that is the reason for doing this. As I went through my life, several of my friends - you know we would talk as friends - they would say I don't know what I am going to do - I am faced with this problem and that problem & I would say what does your plan say? I soon found out that no one else had a plan and I would say "How are you guys doing this without a plan?" Well, my Mother blessed me by teaching me "deferred compensation" (basically) that I would have to wait for what I want and plan to get it. I didn't know that she blessed me in this way until after I had grown up a little bit more. That's why I am doing this. I believe that if we plan our lives according to what God says about our lives and use biblical principles to do so that each of us can have a life that God has intended for us, OK*

Participant A: OK

Alright, don't know if that's a good ok or not ... but that's ok Praise God. One of the things we want to do is look at the process for building a life-plan, but first I want to answer any questions you might have.

Participant A: Um. I know I don't have a life plan, so you are certainly a God-send to me. I have never been one to plan ahead, which is a reason for a lot of my short-comings. I always been a person that lives for the moment (in a good way) - I used to say I don't want to die with any money in the bank - I's working for it, I'm going to use it. I try not to live by that theory anymore - especially being in a marriage.

Instructor: *I understand*

Participant A: I definitely do not have a plan I have a lot of things I want to do, a lot of things I think about a few things on the bucket list at the age now I can retire with SS - but I know that means Medicare or I would not have any insurance period - so its a dilemma - sort of like I must keep working to have insurance. so this is perfect timing - again God has blessed me with you and your plan here, and I pray that I walk away from here with a plan..

Instructor - *Amen, That's a good thing. What about you Participant E?*

Participant E: With me, I am a planner. The only thing about making plans is that I realize that sometimes when we set goals we may not always reach them, but the thing is you go back and reassess what those goals are you set and then even examine what's kept you from arriving at your destination and then adjust them accordingly.

Instructor: is exactly what you are going to do with this

Participant E: If I could just make a statement: When pastor mentioned you and your program, it didn't take me anytime to say I want to be apart of it. Immediately, when he said you were looking for students or participants God had me already to say yes in my heart, before my hand could reach out

Instructor: *Excellent - That's a blessing.*

Participant A: It is It is, nothing is coincidental in our life

That is true: God has a plan for all of us

Participant A: Yes, He does

Instructor: *that's one of the reasons I am so excited about this, is why I not only want to teach you how to do a life plan is that when a person when you change the outlook of one believer you impact the four generations or at least three generations of believers that come after that. It is a trickle effect. One of the things we want to do here is look at not only the **process** of doing the life plan; but if you have the life-plan.... ifs **literally** a spreadsheet, - ok - but we are going to look at biblical scriptures and how they impact each part the particular subject that we are looking at. So we have already established a foundation that the Word of God is a valid foundation for growth and change.*

Participant E: Yes

Instructor: with the **transformation of the mind**, the *heart* changes and the *life* changes.

Participant E: Yes ... Amen

Instructor: *I'd also like to do or to look at: if you were going to change your career, and to look at or envision other career chooses, part of this is teaching the body of Christ, who I call the family of faith to use research technology - technology & research techniques in order to discover new ways of doing things. A lot of our young people particularly, and us not so young, are living in a age that their career becomes whatever job they could keep. Well how would that change if they actually put the work into researching what they want to do and correlate that with the passion or innate skills God has already given them? Each of us are good at something: some people are good at math other people are good at English some people are good at auto mechanics everybody is good at something singing - everybody is good at something. I believe those are innate talents & skills, God has put in us from birth or before birth so that we can*

fulfill the purpose for what God has for our life. I we match what we love to do with our careers we have not only a job that we don't mind going to but its almost like we are not working - because we love what we are doing. OK. So One of the other things is to establish the cost of change. I ask that you think about the cost of change everything that you do has a cost factor on it - everything, and there is also a cost of change if you are going in your life one way and you are decide to change it - it is going to cost you something. You are either going to have to put more effort into it which causes you 'sweat equity' or you're going to have to pay into with money - monetary or your going to have to change your mind which will cause you stress of doing so - but its going to cost you something.

Stopped @ Verbatim 7/22/14 01:16:27

LOGISTICS:

- 1. setting-up document format before class with try-outs to assure not awkward to use, fit on page, easily printed by participants**
- 2. go through written instructions audibly to assure easily understood and comfortable for Instructor & student.**

Instruction:

- 10. listen more without trying to fix the problem - let it go out and listen don't be so quick to fix.**
- 11. learn to listen, present and wait to let others talk.**

Tuesday 7/29/2014 Session 2:

NO AUDIO

Tuesday August 5, 2014 Session 3:

Learning is dialogue with everyone. Learn to pace and leave areas for others. If you talk so much no one else can share. If this is teaching; maybe you should call it lecturing

Awaiting 7pm exactly two students missing, waiting till 7pm to pray in. Student gets online and prays for group and success of class 3. Informed student that P-C is on, but on chat since family working from home in same area.

Instructor: Everyone have a chance to do a little bit of work? Last week we talked about Education and Income. Did you guys have a chance to look at the scriptures surrounding Education and Income?

Curriculum for Session 3 on shared screen on WebEx

P-A: I did not I must have lost my mind cause I completely forgot. I, I went through them last week.

Instructor: The Education & Income was last week but to be done this week. Were you able to identify some things that either you were happy with or needed to change under the categories of education and or income? - You guys make enough money?

P-A, E, C: No, I'm it could be a little more.

PA: We are blessed with what we've got; but be blessed better .

Instructor: OK, have you identified how much more you'd like to make?

P-B: No

P:C - a lot more (typed)

P-E: Yea

Instructor: You have to quantify it, you can't just leave it vague. It has to be something you quantify - you have to put a number to it. Does everyone know how much it takes to run their house for one month?

PE: I got it, well I had it

Instructor: If you know what it takes to run their house per month you can ...

PC: I don't have no house (typed)

Instructor: I guess I should say if you know how much it takes to run your household (I should say) and you have sufficient income to meet that, then you may be ok, if you that where you want to stay but if you want to make some changes if you want more income you need to identify how much more income you want to make. Did you know that you can't even hit a barn unless you aim at it?

P???: Uh Hummm

Instructor: You can stand right next to it (barn) and shoot, but unless you are aiming at it you're not going to hit it. So one of the things under Education; particularly under income, you need to how much income you actually want to have for your household. If you make \$50k will \$75 suffice? If you make \$25k will \$75k suffice? But there is a difference between going from \$50k to \$75k; than going from \$25k to \$75k. That's why it's important to identify what's a comfort zone for you? I always say I know I am ok if the bills can come in and I can let them sit without looking at them for two days. If there is no red mark that says "respond now" - I'm generally alright.

P????: LOL

So these are the things we are looking at as far as income. Now, education goes along with that cause if you decide you make \$100k per year and you need to make that within the next five years - and you're already at \$50k, you may want to think about getting some education to raise that. OK. If you you're at \$10k you may want to look at a change in careers. OK. It all depends on where you are right now, and how far you want to go. Alright? That's where income and education come together.

Everybody needs income; but everyone is not willing to do what it takes in order to get the income that they want. Ever seen someone who wants to sit around and cry all the time that they're broke, but don't want to get up and do nothing?

P???? Too many times, far too many times!

That's the reality of life, so we want to make so we quantify it - we want to put a number to it. It doesn't have to be stagnant, it doesn't have to be the same number forever. It has to be the number that YOU think you need is right for right now. Now, three years down the line ++++ if you go to the doctor's and they say you're going to have another baby ... then you may want to look at that number.

PC: WHO???? Who!

PE: LOL

PE +++ you're laughing now, but it could be you OK?

PA: Now you're talking

PC: Shoot me now (typed)

The reality is that if you are depending on how much money you believe that you need. It depends on the situation that you're in and what your desired goals are. That was last week - Education & Income. If you haven't worked on this yet, you need to catch-up. This is set up for six weeks, the 5th week is a catch-up week OK that's a time that you get on if you have questions or if you need to catch up. Everybody else can take the week out and do what they do. Everybody gets credit for 6 weeks, even if they don't get on. But that week is if you need to catch up or if you have questions. But that's for last week, for this week we are going to move on. First give me questions: Does anyone have questions for Education &/or Income?

P-All: No

The next thing we are going to do is parenting and social relationships. Now understand that not everybody has children in the house. But do you realize that you have influence on grandchildren as well?

P??? Yeah

Ok whether they are grandchildren or children that is parenting. How may know you get to correct some of the mistakes with grandchildren - that's how grandchildren get spoiled. So parenting is: methodology used to raise your children / grandchildren that will produce the long-term desired result - for them and for you. Its been my interaction with other people - with other parents and grandparents, I have found that the biggest question is what they want for their grandchildren or what they want for their children. Most people simply say they want them to be happy. The reality is that we are children of the most high God, Jesus gives us joy and peace as a gift; but happiness is a choice.

PB: Um Huh

It is a definite choice, cause you can happy in spite of your circumstances.

PE: Yes, Indeed

When I figured that out, I was in school overburdened, with a job that didn't make enough money, three babies and a husband that was crazy.

PAE,B,C: Wow LOL

My mother said to me how can you POSSIBLY be that happy and I said cause I can! That's was when she helped me fix my own circumstances with my life plan. I found out fast that if you allow yourself If you don't make a choice to be happy miserable will be gladly to fill in. OK Miserable is always there waiting on you.

PE: Oh yeah

We get no instruction manual with our kids, although I believe we need one. but like everything else it helps to be able to identify what you want the end results to be - that's why we quantify the information. If you want your child to grow up and respect adults - you have to teach then that. If you want your grandchildren to be good stewards - you have to teach them that. If you want your children to learn to read ... you have to read to them - you have to teach them that. If you want them to know that they can do anything and go as far as their minds will take them - you have to teach them that.

I have three sons, that are all different. They are so different and two of them are twins, they are as different as night and day. So I had to be comfortable with who they are. I taught them to think with their own minds, but you know the problem - now they think with their own minds and in teenage years I couldn't tell them anything. But the good thing is that if I go home tomorrow, I know that all three of my sons will make it - cause I taught them critical thinking.

Because when an AA child male child must be able to think through crisis because they going to be facing them all their lives. Everybody understand about parenting.

I do

What I am asking you to do is look at the people you are influencing. Is there something that you want for them that you don't know if they will achieve it? you want them to be happy but also want them to be competent you want them to feel loved, what can you do, or is there anything that needs to be changed to make things turn around. That's what I am asking you to do. It might be that everything is peachy keen it might be great - if it is God has truly blessed you.

See if there anything that needs to be changed

Social relationships: Those relationships with members outside of your immediate family that you value and / or may be useful in elevating economic / social / spiritual results Relationships in our lives are mini-contracts we make with one another. Between us and another person. [00:29:53] of [1:18:16]

Re-Started Tuesday 12/2/2014

INSTRUCTOR:

... its unspoken but it is still made. If anybody ever had anything ever had something happen to them in their life that is just absolutely great? You go to your best friend in the world because you know they are going to celebrate with you ... but you get attitude. Then you are "like, but wait" OK. but wait? Or it could turn the other way: have you ever had a need, a serious need, and you go to that person that who you knew would support you - and they didn't have time. It all depends on what contract you make with one another.

I am a cancer survivor

Participant: Ummm, me too

When I was going through chemo treatment and then radiation, a lot of the people that I thought would be there for me, one particular a person I just knew would be there - they NEVER SHOWED UP.

Participants: Oh My. / Wow

Because the relationship was this: I was the strong one! So if I was the strong one and that relationship allowed them to be the weak one ..., and now I was weak, what were they going to be? Make sense?

Participants: Umm / Make sense.

So I say that the best relationship in the world is one that you can change the terms of the agreement. Angela will attest to: I am not an easy person to be a friend to, because I change the terms on a regular basis. I ...I have a rule that says if I am going to be your friend it will be whether I like you or not, whether you're right or wrong, whether you do what I think you should do or not. But in order to do that we must have changeable terms, because there are times where I will be wrong and I need to have someone to tell me so. And there are times I get to be the strong one and times I get to be the weak one.

Participant ____ ; She is a great friend (typed)

What do you do with relationships that are no longer function able in your life.

Participant : What do you do with them?

What do you do

Participant: leave it dormant, but I stay in the background in case they need something. The door is open but it is inactive.

When it time to let go?

Participant : When they become toxic! (typed)

Participant : when I am your friend, I will keep it dormant - I may shoot them a text or if I see them broke down, stop to help - the door is open

Participant : when is it time to let go of that person totally and completely.

I never meant to say to not be human, that is not what I meant - of course you are always there ... we must be human. But when is it time to protect yourself. ++++++ I will use your word: I have had people in my life that were so negative regarding me that they had become "toxic" in my life. When things started to turn in my favor it is as if they were trying to push me down. You cannot fly with one wing or with an ankle bracelet on. Sometimes, you have to let go. Sometimes in order to go as high as you can you have to let go. Sometimes you can let it stand in the background, but sometimes you have to let go all together. When I became a preacher, I had people stop talking to me.

Participant : I can believe that. They probably thought you would judge them

That was my only crime and it really hurt my heart that they would stop because of that. I say that so that you recognize that when you make your life plan, you also have to look at your relationships, because as you change your life you cant take everybody with you sometimes, you have to prioritize. When I gave my life to the Lord and decided I would not place where I cannot take, Jesus it stopped me from going a lot of places.

If you are truly my friend and I changed my life it should be ok. If you can be who you want to be, I should be able to do the same

Participant: That's true.

Participant: Me, myself, have not had many friends in the past 20 / 30 years. I still have people that I have been friends with all my life but we really didn't have a working relationship. We were good friends we talk, but hadn't spoken in 10 years and another we have not spoken in 15 years, but I still consider them a very good friend. The way I chose to live my life was to surround myself with my family so I didn't have a lot of friends running out of my life and a lot of my relationships - really I didn't have many outside of my family. Now since coming into the church, I am developing relationships with people, which I have not done for many years, so now my friend base is starting to become active - so to speak. Outside my home is the church and I am blessed to have a wife that does these things with me. and um we have both gained friends that we both learned at the same time. So as far as letting go of friends - I never held them so closely that I would have to let them go. So if they did something I didn't care for - it was not as if we were knocking on each other's door everyday in the anyway - and vice versa.

I can receive that, that means you have a handle on it and - that's good, that's good - you are comfortable with who you are.

Participant: I am comfortable; but I also know 'other peoples' luggage can get in your garage'. You know so, I kinda limit myself and put myself inside of a circle and my circle is very tight - and I am happy with that.

Participant ____ : I don't think that I learned that until...., and I am still learning that as I get older I am kind of weeding out friends. Now When you talk about friends or acquaintances, there is a very tight rope you walk on that one - you have to know the difference.

Instructor: Yes you do.

Participant ____ : Whose an acquaintance and whose a friend. that what I had to learn over the years. Since I was a little girl I have always cared about friends - always been social - because I really enjoy people, I like to just experiencing them - to hear their stories - all that. I have had a very hard time throughout my life trying to distinguish who what exactly a friend is. I didn't learn that until I was in college. When I really found my true friends. These are people I believe God let me to. Like I would say something random and from there I would be and have been true friends. These are people I felt God just led me to. I would say something random and then we'd be and have been friends ever since. We don't have to talk all everyday and be all up in each other's worlds all the time - but when we do talk it's like we never missed a beat.

Instructor: Now, that's a true friend

Participant ____: We would be true friends no matter what time, no matter what. I thing that has bombarded me in the last couple of years is a different level of friendship I did not know about ... I guess a 'secret society of friendship that I did not know about'. where people, consider themselves friend now, but I had to realize not everyone has the same definition of friend as you do, so you have to really be able to decipher between their terms, I guess as appose to yours - or whatever - just depending on where you live people that will take on a so called friendship with you and then out of the blue just drop it. like yea well I figured or heard you were this way, so I figured I an not going to deal with you. And so its 'like wow - ok' they are half-way invested and then just like "I don't want to be your friend". I had a so called Christian friend who did this: [043:42 of 1:18;16]

Restart

Participant ____: (name) you like to hang out, you would actually go to a bar to sing karaoke! And I would, I mean I hang out with all times of people, and know all kinds - I can get down with the best of them. I will go a bar, but that doesn't mean I will be 'partake in drinking, necessarily' - I will go to sing Karaoke - I like to have fun in all types of ways. She is like saying to me that : "with me being the Christian that I am, you are really putting yourself out-there and playing with fire. I just don't feel that its right for us to be friends. I'm like 'you know what' - "Jesus didn't go to like church and minister all the time, He went to go minister to people who were sick and all kinds of things He was around all kinds of people. and so I felt at that moment it would not be good for us to get to our relationship because she would have a problem with anything I did. Just based upon my stories that we would share amongst each other in talking. I have a small little crew that I stick with, outside my church family, and they are not near at all. But I have had to really decipher the difference over the years.

Instructor: There is a thin line you have to walk as a Christian, and as a pastor it gets much deeper - believe it. There is a perception we must guard against. The perception says that you are not a true to your calling if you go this place or that place, but in reality says Jesus died on the cross for the sinner not for the Saint. In doing that - in order to have liberty of the Lord you have to know your own calling - who you are in Christ. If you're feet are firmly on the ground there are liberties that can be taken, but you have to guard against a few things because if you place yourself in situations to fall, then you generally will. So when you do it you must remain conscious at all times; you can't let yourself get caught up in the moment and so its a very thin line. Its a sticky situation, sometimes. But for myself, ... you everyone does a little profile of what a friend is to you, for myself its someone who allows me to be who I am. If I can be authentically who I am and allow you to be authentically who you are, then we can be friends. But I will not hold the mask up forever. And I don't believer you should either. I think that you have to be committed to that but also have to be comfortable with that and not every one is comfortable with that. It is varied as the persons who makes the contract. But I want you to be aware as you progress through life as you do this plan ands start to make quantitative changes with this plan - not everyone will walk with you. So you're going to have to analyze and look at your friendships and relationships as well and recognize that.

When I received my calling I said yes, but knew I would be walking a path I had never done, so I consciously sought out people who were walking the way that I wanted to walk, and I shadowed them. Because I am a 'big girl' and I can take a 'hit' I wasn't embarrassed to shadow them. It is a matter of where you want to be and how far you want to go. Anytime you change anything in your life there is going to be push-back. [50:44] (Discussion of testimony of Participant ____ on chat)

Participant ____ (Typed:

"as a child, my family had money compared to a lot around us. My grandfather was perceived to be white. My "friends" were constantly turning on me so I became a separatist at a young age and it turned out that God took that child hood paid and grew it into a man that accepted himself and surrounded himself with those he trusted most. From ++++++ to Everyone(07:34:44 PM)
child hood pain,,,,, "

Instructor: Discussion of Parenting Scriptures - and Social Relationships -

Request Participant's feedback on Insight form: Comment by Participant

Participant A: I learn a lot each week even though we spend only an hour together. Never ceases to amaze me how God puts things in your life and works things out for you. I am smack dab in the middle of a life choice decision that is directly related to what we are doing here. I thank God for the way He is doing things, cause none of us would be here if He didn't want us to.

With revelation and growth for those under 40 and over 60 - what would happen with young people over 13 and under 30 that have the time and energy to truly change their lives and prosper.

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